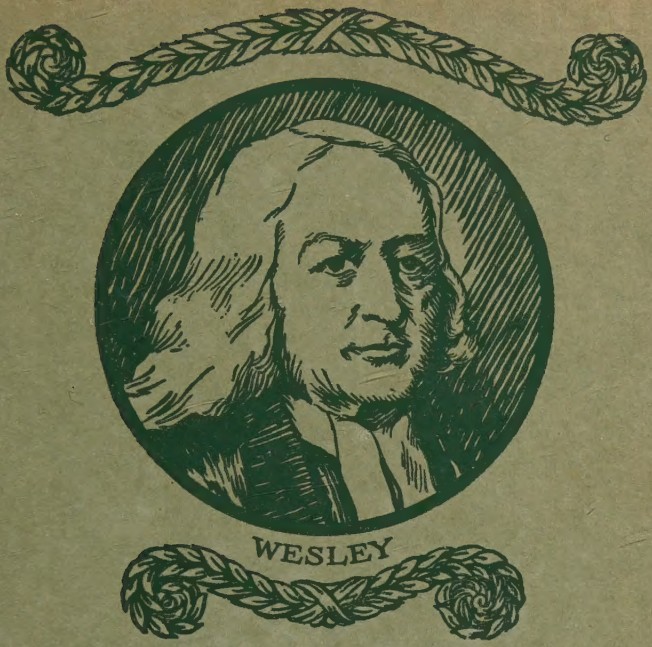


# WESLEY'S LEGACY TO THE WORLD

JOHN ERNEST RATTENBURY

K. STEVE McCORMICK

# Wesley's Legacy to the World

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K. STEVE McCORMICK

# WESLEY'S LEGACY TO THE WORLD

*Six Studies in*
*THE PERMANENT VALUES OF THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL*

By J. Ernest Rattenbury

'I look upon all the World as my parish.'
J. Wesley.

NASHVILLE, TENN.
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## PREFACE

My Quillian lectures of 1928 delivered extempore at Emory University were naturally much briefer than the accompanying book in which they are embedded. I highly appreciate the honor conferred on me by my election to the lectureship and particularly because I am the first Englishman to have been so elected. May I express my thanks for the courtesy and kindness of the President and Staff of the University during my visit to Emory, one of the happiest incidents in my ministerial life. Previous Quillian lectures delivered by doctors of the American Methodist Church have set a high standard of learning for their successors. My Wesley studies are only in a secondary sense philosophical and theological, but I hope may prove not to be without value to students of Methodism. The studies deal almost exclusively with English conditions of life, but I have no doubt that similar studies of world Methodism, especially of the U. S. A., would be productive of much rich material confirmatory of my conclusions. The fruit of the work of Francis Asbury in America, as his monument says, "is to be found in our Christian civilization," but I have purposely confined my attention to English conditions, as only a wide and deep knowledge of American life, which I lack, could justify a similar treatment of American Methodism. I have tried to make this volume as popular in style as possible. My treatment of the influence of Methodism is often practical and devotional, where a more academic handling of the subject might be expected; but it must not be forgotten that Methodism is an experimental religion. I have not thought it necessary to add a bibliography, but it is fitting to state how greatly two twentieth-century publications, Mr. Curnock's standard edition of Wesley's Journal and Dr. Simon's four volumes on Wesley, facilitate the work of a present-day writer on Methodism. The diaries deciphered by Mr. Curnock and his notes which illuminate so many obscure problems are a joy to students of Methodism, while Dr. Simon's "Magnum Opus" supersedes all former biographies of John Wesley

I am under deep obligation also to the writings of two distinguished foreigners, Dr. Elie Halévy, and le Père Piette. Halévy's "History of the English People" is recognized as the indispensable work on England of the early nineteenth century, and nothing in it is more striking than its weighty treatment of Methodism. I hope that le Père Piette's admirable book on Methodism, published in 1925, may soon be translated into English. I question if an abler work on Methodism has ever been written than this sympathetic and penetrating study of a Franciscan priest. Mr. Sidney Dimond's "Psychology of the Methodist Revival" has been useful and illuminating. His psychological treatment of Methodism is particularly timely and novel, although Dr. Caldecott's essay, delivered before the Aristotelian Society, anticipated it. I greatly admire Marie Conway Oemler's book, "The Holy Lover," and regard it not only as an excellent historical novel, but a document of value for an understanding of the real Wesley. Some will criticize my use of a novel as a document of value, but in my opinion Mrs. Oemler adds something, by reason of her imaginative insight, to an understanding of Wesley, that the researches of Dr. Dry-as-Dust will never discover.

The books to which I make most frequent reference are described in the footnotes under the following abbreviations:

W. J.—"The Standard Journals of John Wesley" (8 volumes).

W. W.—"Wesley Works," 1856 (14 volumes), edited by T. Jackson.

N. H. M.—"A New History of Methodism."

Political Works—"The Political Works of John and Charles Wesley," edited by G. Osborn.

Dimond—"Psychology of the Methodist Revival," by S. G. Dimond.

Piette—"La Reaction de John Wesley vans l'Evolution du Protestantisme," by M. Piette.

Halévy—"A History of the English People," by Elie Halévy.

J. E. RATTENBURY.

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# INTRODUCTION

If any one questions why a new book about John Wesley and Methodism should be written, the answer is easy. The greatness of Wesley's personality and the enduring results of his work justify repeated efforts to fully appraise the man and his work. Few people, other than specialists in Methodist history, realize the many-sided nature of the great evangelist's activities. He was not an ordinary religious enthusiast. He was an extraordinary leader of men and a constructive religious genius. He was greater than any book that has been written about him. Many men of note, including some who have little sympathy with Wesley's evangelical emphasis, have given their best thought in endeavoring to explain the man and the Methodism he founded.

Our present author very aptly introduces Wesley as 'The Pilgrim of Eternity,' a true characterization. No man more completely exemplified his brother's hymn, 'A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify.' He was also a citizen of the eighteenth century, a century of famous men. Philosophers, poets, artists, statesmen, generals, theologians, and scholars of singular intellectual power filled the scene in England and on the Continent. But it was an age profoundly decadent in religious life and social uplift. There were notable theorists concerning morals, but an appalling state of moral degradation. It needed spiritual life and social redemption, and these great blessings came with the Wesleyan revival.

Mr. Rattenbury has rendered a great service in pointing out 'The Permanent Values of John Wesley.' It is not enough for us to glory in the rich and vivid days of spiritual power when Wesley and our Methodist fathers preached and sang and shouted their way to victory. We are the sons of those prophets, and to us is committed the charge of con-

serving their gains and passing on the secret of their power. The nature of this secret is disclosed and finely illustrated in these lectures. The choice of the lecturer and the lecturer's choice of a subject is a great hit. As an Englishman, a Methodist, and a man in whom the spirit of evangelism has moved profoundly and effectually in the Wesleyan Church he has given us a fresh and vivid presentation of his theme. It was a great treat to hear the lectures and to come in personal contact with the lecturer. All who heard the lectures will be glad to read them in their more extended form. The wider reading public will have the advantage of the full discussion and the necessary leisure for reading an informing and stimulating book. The book is filled with genuine human interest, original judgments, and spiritual sympathy.

F. N. Parker.

Emory University, Ga.

# Part I

# THE PILGRIM OF ETERNITY

'A man's a man for a' that.'

# I

## AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CITIZEN OF HEAVEN

The purpose of this book is to examine the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century and to show its permanent values for mankind. Of these values the life and character of John Wesley, first of all, demand our attention. We need not accept the mediaeval doctrine of the 'Storehouse of Merits' to believe that civilization is enriched by the lives of good and great men. John Wesley takes a high place amongst the Saints who are permanent possessions of the human race. His character and witness enrich our civilization. He influences more lives in the twentieth century than he did in the eighteenth. His parish—the world—knows him better, and is more ready to acknowledge his incumbency. The English-speaking world, at all events, cannot get rid of him. Not only did he found the greatest Protestant denomination in existence, but he has influenced literature, politics, and social progress; and men of alien minds in many spheres of human life have to reckon with the unexpected activity of the great itinerant. Few Englishmen are as widely known as he, and it is doubtful whether any exercises a wider sway over the world at the present time.

John Wesley was a pilgrim of eternity, who lived in England and sojourned in America in the eighteenth century. Speaking of Newcastle-on-Tyne, he wrote: 'If I did not believe there was another world, I should spend all my summers here. But I seek another country, and therefore am content to be a wanderer upon earth.' But the country he sought was the country from whence he came. He was

a conscious exile 'contending for his native heaven,' spending the days of his pilgrimage as a true Englishman in making colonies—but they were the colonies of the New Jerusalem. Such a man is valuable, not only because he is a citizen of heaven, but because he is a colonist of earth. He interprets Christ to his age by means of his age. His medium matters as well as his message. The age in which a Wesley lives limits him, but also, when accepted, becomes his medium of expression. A man who is before or behind his time is little use to his own age. All effective men come in, what is for them, the fullness of time. Wesley was an eighteenth-century man, and, even when he reacted against his century, he reflected his century. He is not only in some sense *speculum perfectionis*, but also a mirror of his age. He is so much a child of his age that he is one of the men who helps us to visualize the eighteenth century. Wesley's *Journals* are as necessary for an understanding of that fascinating period as Boswell's *Johnson* or Horace Walpole's *Letters*.

It is at first sight surprising to find that the greatest pilgrims of eternity have been the great sons of their own age. Paul, Augustine, Francis, Luther, Wesley, the outstanding interpreters of God to Western civilization, have all been stamped by their age and country, and have often been misinterpreted because their local dialect has not been sufficiently examined. The universal message of the Son of Man was spoken in Galilee, and it was no little part of His world conquest that He was willing to be straitened in order to accomplish that for which He was sent. And His greatest servants have in that respect been like Him. The message and mission of Wesley, though using eighteenth-century modes of thought and practice for their fulfilment, were in some ways made more effective by their very limitations, and it matters to the world to-day that this pilgrim of eternity was an eighteenth-century man. It was the age in which his particular genius could find its best scope, and it

may be discovered that the eighteenth century has made its strongest impact on history through John Wesley. This is becoming increasingly plain in English history, as Professor Halévy's new book shows; and, although eighteenth-century politics would probably suggest other valuations of American history, the influence of Wesley on American springs of action has not yet been calculated, and is perhaps incalculable.

A distinguished man of letters said of Francis of Assisi that he was 'an Imitation of Christ singularly more faithful than that written by Thomas à Kempis.' That is true of all great saints, for no book can be so like Christ as a man or woman. And it might well be said of John Wesley. For if, by his own life and character, Francis interpreted Christ to the thirteenth century, the same is true of Wesley in the eighteenth; and the fact that from an external standpoint they appear so different should not make us lose sight of the essential similarity of these two men.

Each mirrored the age of which he was a child, and they differed in the same way as the thirteenth differs from the eighteenth century. Francis was always a joyous youth. He interprets to us the life of Europe 'at her twentieth year.' He was an evangelized troubadour, 'the jongleur of God.' The legend of his conversion consists of stories of arms and love. And the humanity which he loved to serve he conceived of as his lady of poverty—to be loved and worshipped. His message of fraternity extended far beyond the Brothers Minor, to wolves, fishes, and birds, even to the very sun and moon, to fire and wind and water, and to his sister, the death of the body. His religion was conceived in the imaginative language of chivalry, and his spirit had all the dash and glitter of chivalry. To that age of quick passion and simple joy in color and life, what interpretation could have been more perfect than that of this knightly soul who called together a brotherhood which he dubbed 'paladins of a new round table,' and whose lady love was humanity—sheer

naked humanity—stripped, impoverished, but dear humanity. He showed his love to humanity—his lady of poverty—by the kisses he implanted on the lips of lepers, thus symbolizing his love for all polluted creatures. The extravagance of his devotion was the sublime extravagance of his age and country.

How different from the sober Oxford don, who never quite ceased to be a superior person—the little man, neat in dress, precise in habit, with life disciplined to its last moment, from his silver hair to his silver buckles a child of the eighteenth century. From childhood he reasoned about everything, so that his father said to his wife, 'I profess, sweetheart, I think our Jack would not attend to the most pressing necessities of nature unless he could give a reason for it.' Hating enthusiasm (the eighteenth-century term for fanaticism), which, by a strange irony, Wesley's own practice has raised from an eighteenth-century term of abuse to a twentieth-century term of praise—hating enthusiasm, and always defending himself when accused of it, proud of his successful logic-chopping when at Oxford, he went out into the world armed with syllogisms to put the enemy to flight. Calm, rational, self-controlled, quiet in matter and manner, of a dignity acknowledged by every one, conscious by right of birth and culture of his place amongst the privileged classes, but making himself 'more vile' by defying their conventions, perpetually trampling on inherited and inbred prejudices, so superior did he seem to ordinary mortals that old-fashioned English Wesleyans, who speak of *George* Whitefield, *Edmund* Burke, or *Oliver* Goldsmith, refer to him to this day as *Mr.* Wesley. What similarity can be found between this dignified personage, the product of distinguished ancestry and fine culture, and the childlike Christian troubadour of Assisi? There is just this—that they were both pilgrims of eternity and both *specula perfectionis.*

The artists of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance made

many efforts to portray Jesus. How different from each other the Christs look on their canvases. Fra Angelico, Albert Dürer, Paolo Veronese, Murillo, and Rembrandt all painted their Christs from models among their fellow countrymen. The scenery in their pictures was the scenery of their own times. All the magnificence of contemporary Venice is portrayed in Calinari's ' Marriage Feast of Cana in Galilee.' There was no attempt to depict Galileans of the first century in Galilean surroundings. And the artists' instinct was right, for they were painting ' the Son of Man,' and they could only see the ideal man through the medium of the men they actually saw—their fellow countrymen. And yet there is a curious haunting similarity between these diverse portraits. Take a number of pictures of Jesus, of different ages and countries, in whatever crowded groupings and however differing in nationality, and ask a well instructed child which is Jesus, and he will put his finger on the right figure. I once experimented, and wondered why the child knew, until I remembered that all these artists were haunted by the vision of

> That one face
> Which decomposes but to recompose.

The artists use their own epochs for their picture-frames ; their backgrounds—Perugino's Umbrian trees for instance —are from their own countries ; the men and women who crowd the canvases of Tintoretto, Ghirlandajo, or Benozzo Gozzuli are dressed in the garb of the artists' own periods. We can visualize the buildings and dress of Bruges of the fifteenth century by examining the works of Van Eyck, and realize the colour and life of the Venetian Renaissance by studying the paintings of Titian or Carpaccio ; but, notwithstanding the local and temporal character of the backgrounds, we get glimpses of the artists' vision of Eternal Beauty.

So it is with a Wesley or a Francis. The frame of the

picture and the background is eighteenth century or thirteenth century, and there is no better way of examining either of these epochs than by examining their typical saints. The manners and garments and language are all of their own times, but in their character and lives the face of Christ breaks through, and we catch glimpses of the Heavenly City from which these pilgrims came. These men may be compared to the trumpet of Francis Thompson's splendid figure :

> I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds ;
> Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
> From the hid battlements of Eternity ;
> Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
> Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again.

But it is of real importance not to undervalue the human side of great saints. The value of a Francis and a Wesley is not exhausted by their heavenly citizenship. In some ways it matters as much to us to know how they behaved when on earth. How did they control their human passions and make themselves the instruments of God? The fact that men, in an age as bloodthirsty as the days of Francis or as prosaic as the days of Wesley, could use the very language of their age, the romantic language of knights and troubadours, the drab language of eighteenth-century England, and glorify God by means of them, demonstrates that God is not confined to a particular time or place for His activities, but can always be found in every age and every country to 'shine through the gloom, and point us to the skies.'

All such pilgrims of eternity as Wesley and Francis are in danger of canonization, even of apotheosis. A man who is reverenced as a saint hardly ever remains a real man to the popular feeling, and yet just what makes him valuable is his humanity. The halo hides his natural face. It takes him out of the realms of reality and turns him into a moral

lesson. James Anthony Froude, writing of mediaeval hagiography, says: 'Instead of pictures of real men, the biographers present us with glorified images of what in their opinion the Church heroes ought to have been. St. Cuthbert becomes as legendary as Theseus.'

This is true, more or less, of all saints. The tendency has been noticeable even with Wesley. Indignation with Southey and Quiller-Couch for trying to restore a living man amidst real human beings is common enough among modern Methodists. 'Let the dead Wesleys lie in peace,' they say, forgetting that two of them so live that neither they nor theirs can escape from immortality. An old-fashioned Methodist was never quite happy if one talked plainly about the misfortunes of Mrs. John Wesley. Wesley was quickly apotheosized by Methodists. His graven, molten, and carven images were innumerable. I have counted, in one collection, sixty different busts of Wesley, in every conceivable medium—plaster, wood, marble, china, &c. His portrait was not only seen on the walls of devout Methodists, but it was woven into their counterpanes and table-cloths, and burnt into their teapots and their crockery. The only conceivable thing with which I have never seen it associated was their carpets, presumably because they thought it disrespectful to tread on their idol. There must have been, in proportion to their membership, nearly as many portraits and busts of Wesley in the early nineteenth century in Methodist houses in England as Buddhas in a Buddhist country. Wesley undoubtedly suffered from this semi-idolatry—as the saints do. The spirit which apotheosizes a man destroys the *man*, and it is just the man, of like passions with ourselves, as he struggled and conquered, lived and served, who is really a heritage and inspiration. Hence I shall attempt in the next chapters to sketch some of the human characteristics of John Wesley and try to summarize the forces which moulded the human stuff out of which he was made into a

saint, and then in chapter four portray him on the background of his own age.

The human Wesley, with his limitations as well as his liberations, is what enriches our age, and will continue to enrich the future. 'It is peculiarly cruel to represent him as a faultless being, a sort of deified angel. John Wesley's character is a singularly interesting one because he was such a thorough man.'[1]

[1] Abbey and Overton: *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 317.

## II

## THE HUMAN WESLEY

### (*a*) AN APOSTLE IN THE MAKING

THE acts of John Wesley throughout his long life—his conferences, organizations, societies, and journeys—are important for the light they throw on his age and country and on the structure of the Society he left behind him, but the last forty years, or even more, of his career throw little new light on his essential characteristics. For the purpose of visualizing his main human characteristics a detailed account of his career is unnecessary. His *Journals* are full of interesting glimpses of the England of his day, and contain illuminating views of men and things, and particularly of books, but, taken as a whole, they do no more than confirm the impression one gathers of his character in earlier years. The diaries, which he started in youth, and continued throughout his life, reveal all the time the same careful and disciplined character. The great itinerant going from this place to that, neglecting no duty, however small, carefully noting down in his diary everything he saw, is essentially, in habit, thought, and method, the man of the ' Holy Club.'

His rigid discipline of himself in battle against his natural idleness, which he probably exaggerates, and his determination to be his own master, are revealed by his Oxford diaries and those he wrote on board the *Simmonds*. He made careful notes about his use of every hour and almost every moment of the day. A specimen day from one of his diaries is printed below. They are almost

monotonous records of a severe programme of laborious days and short nights rigorously carried out. Why such rigorous discipline, we ask; why such terrible strivings after God and goodness? We can suggest certain causes, but, on the whole, we may conclude that it was a subconscious preparation for a work which needed a man with a character and physique of steel; and also, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth.'

DIARY ON BOARD THE *Simmonds*

1735. *Saturday*, 18.
4.30. Dressed; prayed; began Genesis 6. Deacon ¾; writ to Varanese.
7. Miss Sally Andrews. Sister Emilia.
8. Talked; writ to Salmon and
9. Clayton.
10. Falcon with Tackner; baptized him!
11. Delamotte senior; read Whiston's Catechism.
1.30. Dinner.
2.30. On board. Conversed.
3.30. German. 4 cabin.
4. Writ to Sister Kezia. Mr. Vernon, Mr. Hutcheson, my Mother.
5. Rivington.
5.30. Talked.
6.15. Devotion. ½ sung.
7. German with Tackner.
7. Conversed. Prayer 9¼.

This is a specimen day chosen from the scores of similar records given in the Standard *Journal*. No detail is omitted that he considers important. He was active from 4.30 o'clock a.m. till 9.30 or 10 every day.

His drastic thoroughness and his hardness to himself remained throughout his life, and it was only because in youth he had so strictly trained his body and brain to be obedient to his will that he could give such concentrated and tireless energy to his great work—his one work of preaching the gospel to all sorts and conditions of men, gathering them into societies and bands, organizing his body of preachers, and

creating the great Methodist machine. At no time in his life did he show any special inventiveness of method. He was not the originator of the 'Holy Club,' and in after life he originated little or nothing. But what he gripped he made effective. He was a natural master of men, and showed an instinct for the right method nothing short of genius—or was it inspiration? If one considers the way in which his organizations flourished and developed, by means which a superficial observer might have called a series of accidents, one cannot wonder that, looking on his life-work, Wesley cried in surprised gratitude, 'What hath God wrought!'

Wesley's power of concentration was won at Epworth and Oxford. He was not without other interests, as is shown by his casual writings on subjects so diverse as electricity[1] and smallholdings, medicine, and general elections. His knowledge of languages and literature, even his occasional touch with great people, indicate that his eyes were often lifted up to wider horizons than those of his mission. And yet such matters were hardly even of secondary importance in his life. His disciplined strength was concentrated on work which must often have been uncongenial to a highly cultured man. An occasional hint of this is given us, as when, according to a note in Charles Wesley's diary, unexpectedly kind treatment at Oxford in 1751 seems to have 'tempted him to escape from the strife of tongues, from vulgar misunderstanding and cruel slander, into the quietude of a cloistered life. Why should he not return to his own college, where a warm welcome awaited him, resume his duties as a college tutor, reorganize the "Holy Club," and live the quiet, celibate, scholarly life so congenial to him?' Or the even more famous words in 1772: 'I often cry out, "Vitae me redde priori." Let me be again an Oxford Methodist. I am often in doubt whether it would not be best for me to resume all my Oxford rules, great and small.'

[1] Wesley's interest in electricity is specially noted by le Père Piette in *La Réaction de John Wesley*, as showing the typically experimental character of his mind.

But, generally speaking, except for such uncertain hints as these, his whole life-purpose is summed up in his brother's hymn :

A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save
And fit it for the sky :

To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfil :
O may it all my powers engage
To do my Master's will !

Of all the anecdotes which throw light on Wesley's character, Boswell's is probably the best.

Johnson said to Boswell : ' John Wesley's conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have out his talk, as I do.'

What a picture ! The literary man with folded legs having his talk out, in contrast with the evangelist, who says in the midst of the most fascinating conversation,

Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I go.

Has ever a young man of thirty-six been more mature than Wesley ? That was his age when he began his great life-work He came to it fully equipped in intellect and character. Even as a child he was old for his years. Human development and culture could not have made a stronger man than he was at the day of his conversion. His later intellectual development was slight. What he said at eighty was what he would have said at forty. His great spiritual experience no doubt set him alight, turned his energies in other directions, sweetened and softened his character, changed a rather hard servant of God into a joyous son, but in essential

human characteristics and intellect he was mature before his conversion.

There is a significant entry in his *Journal* which confirms this. 'September 1, 1778.—I heard a good man say, "Once in seven years I burn all my sermons; for it is a shame if I cannot write better sermons now than I could seven years ago." Whatever others can do,' he continues, 'I really cannot. I cannot write a better sermon on the Good Steward than I did seven years ago. I cannot write a better on the Great Assize than I did twenty years ago; I cannot write a better on the Use of Money than I did nearly thirty years ago; nay, I know not that I can write a better on the Circumcision of the Heart than I did five and forty years ago.'[1] This is probably a true piece of self-analysis. Wesley came to maturity of intellect and character early in life, and spent his days in using body and brain, which he had disciplined till they had become a machine in his heroic and unexampled efforts to make England a Christian country.

Perhaps the best way of estimating Wesley's character and mentality is to examine a cross-section of his life. The Georgian episode is as good as any, and the Diaries and Journals of the period are probably the best—the most graphic and forceful—he ever wrote. In them we see a human being at the height of his purely human development—the natural rather than the hyper-natural Wesley. He reveals himself as he was, and, his human passions and failings notwithstanding, the man unconsciously self-revealed is mature in intellect and fixed in character. He is obviously recognized by everybody as a person of distinction and power who commanded obedience, or at least respect, from the whole colony. He is deeply sincere, but hopelessly wrong-headed, plainly devoted to his clamant sense of vocation, but uncertain as to whither the voice is calling him; he was no mere 'lad o' pairts,' nor was he the half-baked curate of Methodist

[1] *W. J.* VI. 209.

tradition; he was a strong man towering over his fellow Colonials, as is witnessed by his easy triumph over them in his trial. A man with a great work to do—and a personage. In Georgia, the man we meet in some sense had made himself; after Georgia, the man we meet is as God remade him. Enriching and significant as Wesley's conversion was, Wesley's main characteristics remained unchanged. The man who excommunicated in Georgia was the man who throughout his life ruthlessly cut off unworthy members from his societies in every part of England. His discipline in Bristol, February 28, 1741, was the act of the Georgian Wesley. He never ceased to believe in and practise discipline. The hard element was essential to Wesley's success. His conversion set him aflame, but the great itinerant of England was always the man of Georgia. The spark of vitalizing experience which came to Wesley on May 24, 1738, ignited a well-laid fire, and the excellent quality of the fuel had much to do with the intensity of the flame.

Before we examine the man of Georgia we must, in order to understand him, call to mind certain forces which all the time were influencing and moulding his character. No understanding of Wesley is possible that does not take account of his mother's influence. Marie Conway Oemler is right when she says: 'Had his mother been Papist instead of Protestant, it is quite probable that the Roman Catholic Mass would now be celebrated on the altars of Westminster and St. Paul's.'

Wesley was always susceptible to the influence of women. His mother, however, remained his model of what a woman should be, as is shown by his efforts to mould Sophy Hopkey into her image. But in his earlier days he enjoyed the society of a group of highly cultured women, one of whom, Mrs. Delany, became famous, and he was doubtless influenced by his contact with them. With Miss Betty Kirkham it is likely that he had relations of a sentimental character, and

Mr. Curnock has proved that it was she who set him reading Thomas à Kempis. Indeed, Miss Kirkham has some claims to be called the Mother of Methodism. For his reading of Thomas à Kempis and Jeremy Taylor and his association with William Law spurred him on to follow serious religion, and from that quest he never turned back. The activities of the 'Holy Club' were largely the result of his earnest quest for God.

Two other facts had an enormous influence on his development. The first was his escape from the Epworth fire in his infancy, and his mother's incessant dinning in his ears of the Scripture words, 'Is not this a brand plucked from the burning?'

From his childhood schooled by his mother, and afterwards by a mysterious Providence, Wesley believed himself, in more senses than one, 'a brand snatched out of the fire.' 'This was the prophetic word inscribed on the MS. he transcribed in Oxford (March 9, 1738), and it appears as a legend, together with a drawing of a burning house, on one of the engraved portraits published during his lifetime.'[1] These words gave him his awful sense of vocation. He was from childhood a man of destiny. Not only was this his own conscious sense of himself, so that he always took himself seriously, but his whole life-story reveals the fact that he was the plainly chosen vessel of the Lord—the Man of Destiny—'the brand plucked from the burning.' The words 'brand plucked from the burning' ring out like a Greek chorus in the drama of his life. They are written, not only as a motto of one of his *Journals*, and suggested by him as part of his epitaph, but when passion nearly drove him to marriage against his judgement, and he barely escaped committing himself, he wrote: 'Is not this a brand plucked from the burning?'

The second experience which affected Wesley more than is generally recognized came to him in 1729, at the time when

[1] *W. J.* I. 328 *n.*

he was under the influence of William Law and mysticism. 'A serious man said to him, "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember that you cannot serve Him alone. You must therefore find companions, or make them; the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." '[1] This counsel inspired him, his earliest biographer thought, to join the 'Holy Club,' and probably, as I hope to show in a later chapter, deeply influenced his whole work, particularly in his rejection of mysticism, which needs solitariness for its development. Wesley thought mysticism should be distinguished from Christianity, which is a social religion. William Law once said to him, 'I perceive you wish to convert the whole world, Mr. Wesley. You must allow God to take His own time about that.' But the man of destiny dimly saw that he could not leave to God what God had left to him. Was he not God's brand plucked from the burning?

The influence on Wesley of these two things told greatly on the man who all the time was seeking by every means he could to discover the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. In the Georgia record we see one who has done all a strong and able man can do to make the best of himself; we see the human stuff out of which he was made already developed by his own will and intellect to its human highest. He was then all that the works of the law could make him, and perhaps more, for he certainly was not lacking in a measure of divine grace.

One thing must not be omitted in considering the Wesley of the Georgia epoch. His equanimity had been greatly disturbed on his voyage by his own fears. That simple Germans, men, women, and children, should sing hymns fearlessly in the midst of appalling storms because they were not afraid to die, while he, a dignified and disciplined man, was terrified by the thought of death, led him to ask himself whether these people had a religious secret he lacked, and he

[1] *W. J.* I. 469 *n.*

doubtless pondered much on the experience that gave them such joy and fearlessness. In Georgia he began the work of hymn translation, laying the foundation of Methodist song, and reflected, no doubt, on the Moravians' fount of inspiration, which created something in their character and experience missing in his own. What if this were vital Christianity? That this counted in the experience that in future years liberated him can hardly be doubted

Another feature of Wesley's character, not only to understand him in Georgia, but to understand him at all, must be carefully noted—his childlike simplicity, almost credulity. In some ways shrewd enough, he never had the shrewdness of the man of the world. Charles, a much more normal judge of men and their motives, felt that John was made to be the victim of knaves. John acknowledged and defended this trait of character. 'I believed in everybody, Charles believed in no one, and Charles was more often deceived than I.' His simple belief in a vixen of the type of Mrs. Hawkins disgusted Charles Wesley and Delamotte, and even surprised Spangenberg, but John never lost his simple faith in human beings. In this he is akin to Francis of Assisi, who could say to some savage mediaeval baron, Brother Wolf!—for that, I take it, is the true meaning of the legend of the Wolf of Agobbio. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'—they have the spiritual discernment which discovers the divine in the lost, the last, and the least. The Wesley of Georgia is a complex character, but beneath the complexities lies the simplicity of a child.

One of the results of Wesley's childlike frankness was his lack of reserve. Charles said that his brother never could keep a secret. He believed in, and practised, his view that you should tell people exactly what you thought of them. He would not store personal gossip in his mind, but told people plainly what others thought of them. The difficulties of such frankness are illustrated by his attempts to quieten a group of women, such as he met on

his voyage to Georgia, by the frank disclosure of what one said to him about the other. It must be admitted that the simplicity of Wesley in such matters is surprisingly like the simplicity of a simpleton. And yet if everybody took the same course, how much malice and slander would be made impossible ! Again, the frankness of Wesley sometimes became rudeness, a strange thing for a person whose manners charmed his contemporaries, but his letter to William Law, in which he censured him unreasonably, was hardly pardonable, for Law was a great and good man, considerably his senior in years, who had tried to help Wesley. But no understanding of Wesley's character and action can be accurate which does not weigh his childlikeness, which sometimes bordered on childish credulity, and sometimes in its frankness, at all events in his letter to Law, expressed itself uncharitably, and yet, on the whole, is one of the most beautiful traits of this great man's character. No one has portrayed the Wesley of the Oxford days so well as John Gambold (a member of the 'Holy Club'), and it is noteworthy that, while he describes his authority and dignity, he was impressed also with his charm and childlike humility. 'What proposals,' he writes, 'he made to any were sure to charm them, because he was so much in earnest ; nor could they afterwards slight him, because they saw him always the same. . . . He had, I think, something of authority in his countenance, though, as he did not want address, he could soften his manner, and point it as occasion required. Yet he never assumed anything to himself above his companions, and they might speak their minds, and their words were as strictly regarded by him as his word by them. If any one could have provoked him, I should, for I was very slow . . . and very remiss. . . . One time he was in fear that I had taken up notions that were not safe . . . so he came over [to Stanton Harcourt] and stayed with me near a week. . . . I never saw more humility in him than at this time.'

This human instrument of far-reaching divine purposes missed in his Georgia days the supreme greatness which came with the illumination of the Aldersgate Street experience. It is a common practice to criticize the Georgian Wesley as a rather offensive ritualist, but the criticism is very superficial. The essential human qualities of Wesley are to be found in his mission to Georgia as perhaps nowhere else. Our sense of the lack of supernatural quickening only reveals the parts and potentialities of the man who was to be quickened. The unlovely characteristics of Wesley at this time were the defects of his qualities. They divulge the indomitable strength of will and elemental passion of heart so necessary to his success. Before we study them in detail we may dwell on the beautiful description of Wesley, as he afterwards became, from the pen of Alexander Knox, who is claimed by Canon Overton to have understood Wesley better than any man, living or dead. Knox wrote in criticism of Southey's depreciation of Wesley:

During the period of my occasional intercourse with Mr. Wesley, I passed from childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood; not without some material changes in my mind and habits. At an early age I was a member of Mr. Wesley's Society, but my connexion with it was not of long duration. Still, my veneration for Mr. Wesley himself suffered no diminution; rather, as I became more capable of estimating him without prejudice, my conviction of his excellence, and my attachment to his goodness, gained fresh strength and deeper cordiality. It will hardly be denied that, even in this frail and corrupted world, we sometimes meet persons who, in their very mien and aspect, as well as in the whole habit of life, manifest such a stamp and signature of virtue as to make our judgement of them a matter of intuition, rather than a result of continual examination. I never met a human being who came more perfectly within this description than John Wesley. It was impossible

to converse with him—I might say, to look at him—without being persuaded, not only that his heart and mind were animated with the purest and most exalted goodness, but that the instinctive bent of his nature accorded so congenially with his Christian principles as to give a pledge for his practical consistency in which it was impossible not to place confidence. It would be far too little to say that it was impossible to suspect him of any moral taint; for it was obvious that every movement bespoke as perfect a contrariety to all that was earthly or animal as could be imagined in a mortal being. His countenance, as well as conversation, expressed an habitual gaiety of heart, which nothing but conscious virtue and innocence could have bestowed. He was, in truth, the most perfect specimen of moral happiness which I ever saw; and my acquaintance with him has done more to teach me what a heaven upon earth is implied in the maturity of Christian piety, than all I have elsewhere seen, or heard, or read, except in the sacred volume.[1]

Here is the full-length picture of the man who was a mirror of Christ to the eighteenth century, but the Georgia *Journals* show us the human materials out of which the divine hand was fashioning the mirror.

[1] J. S. Simon: *Wesley, the Master-Builder*, pp. 175–6.

## III

## THE HUMAN WESLEY

### (*b*) THE HOLY LOVER

When Wesley arrived in Georgia, he was thirty-two years of age, and old for his years. His life had been disciplined from the beginning by his mother, by poverty, and, for the last ten years, by deliberate asceticism. Gambold's sketch of him at Oxford, quoted above, reveals a mature man, who controlled himself and others, and who moved about with the assured ease of a godly, cultured, and disciplined person. He was not without experience of life. He had done tutorial work at Oxford and parochial work in Lincolnshire. He came to Georgia with the sense that he was a man of destiny, and that perhaps America was the sphere in which to discover his life-work. He showed as great an earnestness in striving to convert people to Christianity on his voyage to Georgia as ever he did. No more graphic picture is to be found of the burning missionary zeal of Wesley than his ceaseless prayers and interviews with passengers on the ship and his efforts to evangelize all with whom he came in contact on board the *Simmonds*. It is true his efforts were largely ineffective, and must have been intolerably boring to normal people, but there can be no doubt of the tremendous purpose with which he was even then moved. That Charles Wesley, Ingham, and Delamotte supported him is, of course, true. But he plainly was the dominating spirit.

A vivid impression of the character of John Wesley can be readily gathered by any one who reads, with intelligence, the Georgian *Journals*, but an even simpler way of seeing

the Wesley of those days is to read Marie Conway Oemler's brilliant novel *The Holy Lover*. Mrs. Oemler has told the Georgia love story of Wesley with a fidelity to fact very rare in a historical novel, and has depicted the character of the self-revealing journals with inimitable skill. She sketches a credible human being. An English writer, Sydney Dimond, has recently published an able psychological analysis of Wesley, which confirms in many ways the truth of Mrs. Oemler's picture, but the constructive portrait of the American authoress, by means of her creative imagination, brings us into contact with a living man, much to be preferred to the dissected psychological skeleton of psycho-analytical anatomy, however able.

In one respect only is Mrs. Oemler's account of John Wesley to be criticized. She says he never had a sense of humour; 'he inherited from his mother his inability to perceive the necessity of laughter.' Can this judgement stand? Wesley was unquestionably a witty man. But is there not humour as well as wit in his letter to Alexander Mather, who told him he was called of God to preach, and was informed by Wesley that it was a common temptation of the devil to young men to think they were called of God to preach. 'Let me hear you and then I shall know.' Is there no humour in such an entry in his *Journal* as, 'I inquired concerning John Trembath's late illness. It was a second relapse into spotted fever, in the height of which they gave him sack, cold milk and apples, and plums as much as he could swallow. I can see no way to account for his recovery but that he had not then finished his work.'[1]

Mrs. Oemler has not reckoned with the words of Samuel Bradburn, a well-known early Methodist humorist, who, writing of Wesley, whom he knew well, says, 'He had an almost inexhaustible fund of stories and anecdotes, adapted to all kinds of people, and to every occurrence in life. . . . When speaking of any who imagined religion would make

[1] *W. J.* III. 257.

people morose or gloomy, I have heard him say in the pulpit, 'that sour godliness is the devil's religion.'[1] Gaiety is specially noted by Alexander Knox as characteristic of Wesley. Dr. Augustin Leger, the writer on Wesley's later love episode with Grace Murray, particularly emphasizes his sense of humour.

What Mrs. Oemler means might perhaps be better expressed by saying that Wesley's sense that he was a man of destiny sometimes obscured his sense of humour. No doubt that is true, because his realization of his tremendous vocation was so great that he always took himself seriously. When a man is overpowered with a conviction of his own importance, even though it be as an instrument only that he feels himself important, such a feeling will open him to the criticism that he lacks a sense of proportion, if not of humour. But it must not be forgotten that history confirms Wesley's own conviction that he was a man plucked by God's hand from the burning for His own great purposes; and that his sense of proportion, however seriously it made him take himself, was perfectly accurate.

Mrs. Oemler's deduction from these facts differs from this. 'There never was a time,' she writes, 'when he did not hunger with all his heart to be and to do good. He would serve God and he would serve man; but he could not realize as yet that he really loved neither, seeing in both only the opportunity for his own particular salvation. His underlying thought was for himself—my beloved I—his chief motive the fear of hell and the hope of heaven. There was not in this enormous selfishness any sense of hypocrisy, for he had no sense of humour. He could no more laugh at himself than he could imagine the Most High engaging in a fit of giggles.'

This would be truer if it had been written: His underlying thought was ever for his mission, his great destiny and vocation—and his chief motive kindred to that of the

[1] Bradburn, S.: *Select Letters*, Introduction, p. xvii.

Apostle Paul's ' Woe is me if I preach not the gospel,' or Francis Thompson's painful description of himself as of one weighted from Eternity with ' The curse of destinate verse.' Wesley was not a vulgarly selfish man, but anything that would hamper or mar the work, for which he ' was God's brand—firebrand—plucked from the burning,' he would reject, whoever might suffer, were it a tender and much-loved maiden like Miss Sophy, or himself—and his Diary records in words of profound anguish what indescribable tortures of soul he underwent by his separation from Sophy.

' 8.0 *p.m.*, *March* 9, 1737.

> No such day since I first saw the sun !
> O deal tenderly with Thy servant !
> Let me not see such another ! '

That Wesley felt himself a man of destiny with some great work to do must be remembered even when we read in his own statement that he went to Georgia to save his own soul. That statement gives an unfavourable and probably unfair view of Wesley, unless it is read in the context of his career. As with all men with an acute sense of vocation, the obedience to the imperative voice is necessary to salvation, but his vocation to salvation included as a vital factor his mission to other men. Even in his well-known earlier letter to his father, his apparent selfishness can be over-estimated. He writes : ' The question is not whether I could do more good to others there or here ; but whether I could do more good to myself, seeing that wherever *I can be most holy myself, I can most promote*[1] holiness in others.' The individualism of this may be entirely wrong, and his motives mixed, but the stated object of his desire for holiness is ' *to promote holiness in others.*' Wesley was conscious that he was not good enough yet to make his mission effective. As our Lord said to His mother, so Wesley said to his father, ' My hour is not yet come.'

[1] Italics mine.

The vocation of a man like Wesley is always merciless—merciless to himself and to those who love him. However much he was attracted by women—and attracted he was—he would not permit them to hamper his vocation, which was the first thing he would make sure. And immediately after his ill-starred marriage he wrote words which it would have been impossible for him to have written if he had married Sophy Hopkey.

'I cannot understand how a Methodist Preacher can answer to God to preach one sermon or travel one day less in a married state than in a single state. In this respect surely "it remaineth that they who have wives be as though they have none."'[1] If he had married a woman whom he had taken for love's sake, whatever he actually did or left undone, he would at least have understood. It was good for the woman as well as for the man that this brand was plucked from burning.

No experiences of John Wesley give us so vivid a realization of his humanness as the Georgia love episode. His love of Grace Murray in later days and his bitter disappointment was in many ways a similar episode, but his feeling about her as a helpmeet in his work as well as a wife lessens, to some extent, the humanity of the story. And in the whole story of Georgia, with his preposterous ecclesiastical discipline, and his application of a rigid and calculated ritualism, we get a better view of the sort of humanity which was moulded by later experiences into so excellent a saint-hood. That we should have so detailed and frank an account of the deep and passionate human experiences this great man underwent is a piece of great good fortune for the Christian psychologist. He was a man of like passions with ourselves, but a man of destiny.

Mrs. Oemler's description of Wesley's appearance and demeanour is both true and vivid. She writes:

'He was a beautiful little man, under medium height, like

[1] *W. J.* III. 517

all the Wesleys, very slender and spare of body, but so justly proportioned that his lack of height wore the aspect of an added grace. In company with larger men, he compared as might a rapier against a sword. He wore his dark hair rather long, curling slightly at the ends, and brushed to a burning glossiness. His large, dark blue eyes had that clear cold light which expresses will and the autocratic intellect; for he had not yet attained the sweet patience which made his later years so gracious. In his ascetic and intellectual face, one feature alone did not jibe with the rest; the firm chin was cleft. Unexpectedly, delightfully, as if Ariel had lightly touched the chin of the Sphinx, and left a baffling, fairy fingerprint, John Wesley's chin was cleft.

'The precision of his mind expressed itself in a sort of austere dandyism. He could bear nothing out of order, nothing amiss, nothing careless. His clothes, of which his supply was just sufficient to his needs, were spinsterishly neat. His hand was fine, nervous, delicate, very strong, like all perfectly made things, his leg in his plain hose very shapely. And nothing, not the macerating fasts, the merciless hours, the terrific strain, the strenuous endless labour, nor the inhuman exposure to all sorts of weather ever marred the beauty of his complexion, which had the pure freshness of a young child's. He had the strength of tested steel; he could stand fatigues and overstrain which would have killed a stronger man. Used to the society of elegant and accomplished women, his manners had the incommunicable simplicity of fine art; it had taken generations to produce the polished naturalness of John Wesley.'

The story of the Georgia mission is full of human interest. The well-bred gentleman of the foregoing description was well fitted to impress the crude communities in which he laboured as an unusual person, and he seems to have been generally respected and generally disliked. He applied remorselessly on his parishioners his conception of ecclesiastical

religion, insisting on the practice of the whole Anglican Church discipline, even archaic discipline, with rigorous exactness. Women must have their infants immersed, unless they certified their special delicacy, if he was to baptize them. He could admit no one to Holy Communion without previous notice. All sorts of ancient Church services were restored. People were pulled out of their beds at unreasonable hours for worship.

The Diary of Wesley 'bears constant testimony to the orderliness and neatness of his daily life in Georgia—in a word, to his Methodism. He rose early and retired early; the first hour, or hour and a half, of the morning he reserved for devotion—private, "company," and public. He read the Scriptures according to the Calendar, and expounded (usually the Second Lesson) twice every day; morning, noon, and evening he prayed, following the rule of the Early Church, which had been adopted by "Our Company" in Oxford; after breakfast he read or wrote until twelve, except on Sundays and Church fasts and festivals, when he preached and celebrated Holy Communion. In the afternoon he visited the sick and those who needed pastoral tending; always he seems to have had pupils; he taught Greek, Hebrew, French, German, Church history, Canon law, and in one case anatomy. The regularity of his life was often broken in upon by urgencies. Thrown out of gear for an hour, a day, or a week, he returned with unerring instinct to the normal so that there was never more than a minimum waste of time.'[1]

To these duties must be added his recreation—gardening. 'He was ever at best in his garden, and when Sophy thought of him, it was against this green background of trees and shrubs and flowers and grass, under the blueness that was the Georgia sky. Wesley's garden always had a lovely touch of homeliness.'[2] He also took exercise by means of long walks; like Gladstone he loved to swing the woodman's

[1] *W. J.* I. 280*n*. [2] *The Holy Lover.*

axe, and, with all his ecclesiastical asceticism, he loved the sunshine and the wind, for he was an open-air man.

His love of a garden, and his handiwork in it in the construction of arbours and garden seats, and the like, and his delight in flowers are beautiful human touches. But the two facts that moulded his character and life were all the time plainly at work. He was preparing in Georgia, however unconsciously, for his life-work and his 'companies'—his grouping of people for religious fellowship were early experiments in organizations to bear rich fruit in other days. He believed Christianity was a social religion.

Altogether the most important event in his career in Georgia was his love of Sophy Hopkey. In that passionate experience he reveals himself as in nothing else. Man of culture and character as he was, he was shaken to the depths by his experience. Wesley's head was one of the best, his will indomitable, but his heart was his greatest possession. 'His heart,' said Alexander Knox, 'was the strength of his moral nature far more than his understanding or his imagination.' And that heart is laid bare in the record of his Georgia *Journal*. His delineation of the character of Miss Sophy is one of the tenderest and most attractive of his writings. His love of her was reverent and beautiful, but it is clear that he did not want to marry. The conflict of which the *Journal* tells was one between love and vocation, and on the document in which he described his passion and his admiration, in which he showed how nearly he became betrothed to her, he inscribed the significant words 'brand plucked from the burning.' But of the depth and genuineness of his feeling there can be no sort of doubt—a quotation or two will suffice to show that.

'I saw myself in the toils. But how to escape I saw not. If I continued to converse with her, I should love her more and more. And the time to break it off was past. I felt it was now beyond my strength. My resolutions indeed

remained. But how long? Yet a little longer, till another shock of temptation, and then I well knew they would break asunder as a thread of tow that has touched the fire. . . . So that all these things were against me, and I lay struggling in the net; nay, scarcely struggling, as even fearing to be delivered.'

'It is hard to describe the complication of passions and tumult of thought which I then felt; fear of her approaching misery, and tender pity; grief for my own loss; love shooting through all the recesses of my soul, and sharpening every thought and passion. Underneath there was a faint desire to do and suffer the will of God, which joined to a doubt whether that proposal would be accepted, was just strong enough to prevent my saying plainly (what I wonder to this hour I did not say), "Miss Sophy, will you marry me?"'

And after all was over he writes: 'I came home and went into my garden. I walked up and down, seeking rest but finding none. To see her no more; that thought was as the piercing of a sword; it was not to be borne, nor to be shaken off. I was weary of the world, of light, of life. Yet one way remained, to seek God—a very present help in time of trouble. And I did seek after God, but I found Him not. I forsook Him before; now He forsook me. I could not pray. Then indeed the snares of death were about me; the pains of hell overtook me.'

Sometimes when we read of Wesley's toils and judgements, when we think of his life, we can only exclaim, The man was superhuman! But in these confessions we know that he was human, very human, and we are glad—notwithstanding our sympathies. Dr. Augustin Leger, however, is right when he says in his summary of the later love episode of Wesley and Grace Murray, 'For God was after all the only lasting absorbing passion of John Wesley'—and Wesley might have written of the Georgia episode as of that of Newcastle:

Teach me, from every pleasing snare,
To keep the issues of my Heart:
Be Thou my Love, my Joy, my Fear,
Thou my eternal Portion art,
Be Thou my never-failing friend,
And love, O love me to the end.

When in Georgia, Wesley translated the great German hymn of Tersteegen, 'Thou hidden love of God unknown.' Our version of verse 2 reads:

Is there a thing beneath the sun
That strives with Thee my heart to share?
Ah, tear it thence, and reign alone,
The Lord of every motion there!
Then shall my heart from earth be free,
When it hath found repose in Thee.

It is perhaps significant considering the time when it was first published that it read originally:

Ah, tear it thence, that Thou alone
Mayst reign *unrivalled* monarch there,
*From earthly loves I must be free*
Ere I can find repose in Thee.

After the crisis Wesley's sympathies narrowed again, and the ritualist became uppermost in him. It seems almost incredible that he should have repelled Sophy, now married, from Holy Communion as he afterwards did, on the ground of dissimulation, and there is no greater blot on his career. The touch of hardness is found more than once in the Georgia days—but was that not necessary for such a career as his? Hardness was part of the human fuel soon to be set aflame at Aldersgate Street. It formed an excuse for the people of Georgia to get rid of him. But his skilful treatment of the charges made against him in the courts shows clearly how superior he was to the colonials of his day.

He reminds one at this time more than once of Ibsen's Brand, that hard and heroic soul, who was ultimately chased by his exasperated parishioners out of his parish into the grim Norwegian mountains. So the Georgians drove Wesley to the ocean.

So one gets glimpses in the Georgia *Journals* of John Wesley hard to himself and to others, and yet with a tender, human heart, dignified and gentle, cultured and beautiful in body and mind, and yet always in the grip of the profound conviction that he had not been snatched from the burning for nothing!

Mrs. Oemler's analysis of Wesley's character and mentality at this period is well worth reading, but it is necessary to note again that the word 'vocation' or 'mission' should sometimes be written when she writes 'self.' Wesley's egoism was largely the expression of his quite true sense of vocation.

'If you had asked him even at that time, "What do you really want? What do you demand of life?" he would have answered instantly with all sincerity—God. John Wesley's inherent desire, thus, was to attain God. And God was reflected in the cloudy mirror of his own unconscious religious mysticism. In this cloudy mirror was also projected another shadow, the vraisemblance of John Wesley's self. It followed that, like all mystics, he must at times mistake the reflected self of the one for the divine of the other.

'The age in which he appeared, that cynical and calculating age, which doubted everything and believed nothing, did not lend itself kindly to mysticism, or even, indeed, to religion. The very nature and climate of his people and country militated against it. If, for instance, William Law had said to John Wesley, "My friend, you too are a mystic," Wesley would have recoiled. Mysticism is the romance of religion, and Wesley wished to be, and was to a great extent practical.

'He wished to organize, to act. He had the dynamic efficiency of Loyola rather than the rapturous insight of St. John of the Cross. The great Spaniard could by the sheer force of his blazing faith halt the armies of Protestantism at the moment of their apparent triumph, and, standing in the confines of the Latin world, brandish a crucifix and shout: "*They shall not pass.*" The great Englishman would . . . after awhile . . . by that same force of faith halt the progress of religious dry-rot in his own nation, shake a moribund Church out of its grave-clothes in which it was shrouded, reanimate the paralysed conscience of an age, and reawaken a comprehensible and living faith in the hearts of the common people.'

That is well and nobly said—that was the Wesley—all but made in Georgia. The more we study the journals and diaries of this period the better shall we understand the splendid stuff out of which the great evangelist was being fashioned. And to find in him hard and narrow patches is only to find the iron God wanted in his great crusader; but along with it we shall not forget the heart that bled and suffered through its human love and became the more fixed in the Divine Love—nor let us forget the garden.

To sum up, John Wesley, aged thirty-four, was mature in body and in mind; a man of parts and a man of power; applying his disciplined energy to the further culture of his mind and character and to the duties of his office. A strong man, and a man to be reckoned with, hard on himself and hard on others, spending all the time he could spare from the performance of religious duties for the acquisition of knowledge and for its widest possible dissemination, evidently convinced that what a soft world needed was discipline, and applying and illustrating his conviction with fanatical rigidity. Quiet in manners and self-contained, he was a reservoir of pent-up energies. An occasional glimpse of a sweeter humanity is caught when he is seen in his garden, and a startling revelation of his strong

emotional nature, in strange contrast to his general demeanour, which was neat and trim as an eighteenth-century garden. Glimpses of his subconscious personality reveal the Wild, ready to invade the trim Oxford don with elemental passions, the disturbing force of which he only just escapes. But all the time his personality was being shaped by great convictions; he was half-unconsciously preparing for his great life-work; neither man nor woman might seduce him from his high vocation. With all his complexities he was a simple soul with a fixed purpose. His sense that Christianity is a social religion expressed itself in his early efforts to group people together for mutual edification and for service, and above all in the fact that he was forging the weapon of which his brother would be a greater master —hymnody, whereby men and women would find a new method of religion and fellowship, and the Devil himself be sung out of England. He remained the master of himself, and emerged scatheless from the furnace. But he was spiritually still at sea, seeking a country of which he only got fugitive glimpses sometimes through the faith of the simple and fearless Germans, but into which he had not entered yet. That country was really quite near, only hidden by a mist soon to be scattered by a beam of divine light.

## IV

## THE MAN AND HIS AGE

JOHN WESLEY—the very human Wesley—disciplined and cultured as he was, having done all that an earnest and able man could do to equip himself for his life-work, but having quite failed in Georgia, his first real experiment, to do anything effective, was standing, although he knew it not, on the brink of a great discovery. His contact with the Moravians, both on board the *Simmonds* and in Georgia, and the study of their hymns, of which the translation was one of his principal occupations at this period, doubtless caused him to pay close attention to their fundamental tenets. The doctrine of justification by faith only, became for him the most absorbing of all problems. The part the reason of John Wesley played in his conversion is often overlooked; he put every argument he could against a doctrine which savoured of 'enthusiasm.' He acknowledges that, on an appeal to Scripture, Peter Böhler overcame his reasoning, and that he was driven back point by point to demand living witnesses of the truth of Böhler's doctrine. Böhler had no difficulty in finding them.

'When Peter Böhler,' he writes, 'whom God prepared for me as soon as I came to London, affirmed of true faith in Christ (which is but one) that it had these two fruits inseparably attending it, "dominion over sin and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness," I was quite amazed, and looked upon it as a new gospel. If this was so, it was clear I had not felt it. But I was not willing to be convinced of this. Therefore I disputed with all my might and laboured to prove that faith might be where these were not; for all

Scriptures relating to this I had long since been taught to construe away, and to call all Presbyterians who spoke otherwise. Besides, I well saw no man could in the nature of things have such a faith and not feel it. But I *felt* it not.'

But Peter Böhler convinced Wesley's intellect, both by Scripture and by witnesses, of the reality of salvation by faith. If he did not reason himself into his faith, he reasoned himself to the very boundaries of the kingdom of faith. This was like Wesley—always rational, notwithstanding his deep and emotional nature ; he was already convinced in intellect when he sought a personal experience of God and when he found it in the memorable day, May 24, 1738, of which he was able to write, ' My heart was strangely warmed.'

And then the man of Epworth and Charterhouse, of Oxford and Georgia, was set on fire, and he began to understand why the brand had been plucked from the burning. He went forth from Aldersgate Street a man liberated for his work. Charles Wesley wrote a hymn soon afterwards which described the experience of John's as well as of his own conversion :

I woke, the dungeon flamed with light ;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

From henceforth he was a free man, following his Lord wherever He led him. Much could be written about that apostolic ministry, but it is sufficient for our purpose to summarize it in Charles Wesley's words :

See how great a flame aspires,
Kindled by a spark of grace !
Jesu's love the nation fires,
Sets the kingdoms on a blaze ;
More and more it spreads and grows,
Ever mighty to prevail ;
Sin's strongholds it now o'erthrows,
Shakes the trembling gates of hell.

The pilgrim of eternity was a man of his own times. No one reflected the age against which John Wesley fulminated

so well as John Wesley. He will always be regarded as a typical eighteenth-century man.

With all its charm it was a tame age, an age of common sense with little wide vision, of hatred of fanaticism, reacting from the extravagances, political and religious, of the previous century. It had, no doubt, a picturesqueness of its own—the picturesqueness of an artificial garden; its hideous things were most carefully hidden; it danced the minuet; the dress of its fashionable people was beautiful; but its refinements harmonized with the picturesqueness of the garden, not of the mountains. Society was restrained; its great writers, like Butler, were sober in expression; it was a time of classical renaissance, but of an artificial classicism; it suppressed vivid expression of life as vulgar; it frowned on vitality, and hated the bizarre, whatever form it took, whether of the gorgeous disorder of Gothic architecture or the religious exuberance of the seventeenth-century Puritan. In a word, its ideal was the trim and well-ordered garden.

The age reasoned away, not only the things that were reasonable, but the things that were super-rational—a trim, sharp-edged age, which believed only what it saw, and lacked spiritual vision. The politically dominant power was that of the soulless and self-satisfied Whig. Pope and Dryden were its typical poets. Johnson's circle were elegant and interesting people, but their limitations reflected the period. The amazing genius of Goldsmith was not altogether tamed by the age, but was there ever an Irishman so harmonious in expression? The pencil of Reynolds, Romney, and Gainsborough painted pictures of social life attractive in their sweetness, but there is little of elemental passion on their immortal canvases. Nothing more restful can be found by tired eyes than their pictures, but no less passionate school of painters ever existed. With all its ordered beauty it was a stagnant century, little recking what volcanic eruptions were to break on European society when its sun was setting.

To acute foreign observers religion in England seemed dead or dying. The Nonconformist dealt chiefly, as John Nelson shrewdly said, 'in notions.' And plain morality, honesty, and decency were the virtues Anglicanism, dead at heart, coldly taught. Deism in the Church and out of it was rampant. Religion was being undermined in the pulpit. The Presbyterian Churches of the day were denying the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of our Lord. They have for the most part perished, as all Christian communities seem to do which rationalize away the mystery of God. Charles Wesley wrote a couplet rightly repudiated by our own age, but which, with all its fury, might well have been justified in his (although, in point of fact, he applied it exclusively to Mohammedans):

> The Unitarian fiend expel,
> And drive his doctrine back to hell.

There are forces in human nature, longings, and aspirations to be satisfied, passions and temptations to be quelled, for which mere morality, barely even touched with emotion, is no remedy, but a mere conceited irrelevance.

Underneath all the cultivated artificiality of this sceptical age there were horrors barely hid. Intemperance never made greater havoc in England than in the eighteenth century, and much of the daily practice of the masses was coarse and barbarian to an almost incredible extent. The industrial revolution was in its infancy, and it soon began to create the human problems which became so apparent in the succeeding century. Millions were without God and without hope in the world, who gratified their soul life, so far as it could be gratified, with pleasure and sports of an unspeakably disgusting and degrading kind.

This age needed a voice which could speak eternal truth in its own dialect. Wesley experienced genuine religion, and found God in Christ. His deep emotional nature, carefully hidden away, like all the deeper things of the eighteenth

century, was stirred to its depths. He had sought God in the way an eighteenth-century man of culture would—he had reasoned himself into a rejection of inherited prejudice and an acceptance of evangelical truth, and illuminating revelation had crowned his intellectual and moral quest with first-hand knowledge of God. He was no accidental finder of treasure in a field, but a man who sold all for the pearl of great price, and was willing to make himself more and more ' vile ' to keep it. The gift he received he reflected upon, and translated into the language, and interpreted to the people, of his own day. He was always cool and collected, writing his so-called ' calm appeals ' to his contemporaries, and was never swept off his feet by gusts of passion like some of his coadjutors. There was nothing he resented so much as the accusation of ' enthusiasm.' When called a fanatic this quiet and reasonable Oxford don refurbished his Oxford dialectics and tilted at bishops and dignitaries as much to prove his own rationality as for any other reason. And his other controversies were against systems—Mysticism, Calvinism and Antinomianism—which he felt were stained with fanaticism, or lacked in common sense, or threatened common morality. Wesley expressed the common-sense temper of the eighteenth century in these matters. He was impatient—for another age even too impatient—with reverent speculation about truth, but, then, he was the apostle of the eighteenth century, and he said he had little patience with the argument that you were not to do good in your own times because it might result in harm in the future !

Surely there never was a man with so vivid a religious experience as his, and with an instrument in his hands so capable of quickening emotion as the Methodist hymns and tunes, and with such contacts with people excited by their new-found raptures, and with such a power of moving multitudes, who remained so calm, cool, collected, and self-possessed as this eighteenth-century pilgrim of eternity.

What gave him a foothold in his time for his great message was not more the profound conviction of its truth than his determination as an eighteenth-century man to measure and weigh everything by the laws of reason, common sense, and morality.

The credulity and superstition of Wesley have always been seen out of proportion. Their apparent inconsistency with his common-sense temper have caused them to be greatly discussed. But, though they were there, they touched nothing essential. His very *sortes biblicae* were only applied when he had no idea what to do, though he knew something must be done. And, really, when a man must act in such a situation, if he can find no rational ground for going one way or another, *sortes biblicae*, to say the least of it, are as likely to guide him rightly as any other method. In all critical matters Wesley showed to the full the common sense of Johnson and Locke, Butler and Walpole; he was a child of his own age.

But I would sum him up as the great itinerant. He was an evangelical centaur. The truest vision of him one can see is as the man on horseback, the reins loose, the saddle-bags full of books, the little man reading or writing, but always marching on from town to town and village to village, to conquest and to victory. Of John Wesley there exist busts and pictures innumerable, and they almost always depict a clergyman in full canonicals. Is this Wesley as he really was? Why is there no equestrian statue of John Wesley? He rode on horseback many thousands of miles over roads dangerous and sometimes to all appearance impassable, to preach his message. He read and wrote as he rode, trusting his horse. If he did not, like Francis, speak of 'Brother wolf' and 'Sister birds,' he surely said 'Brother horse' to the constant companion of his journeys.[1]

[1] He said to his itinerant preachers, 'Be merciful to your beast. Not only ride moderately, but see *with your own eyes* that your horse be rubbed, fed, and bedded.'

But he was no ordinary traveller. To many of his contemporaries he may have seemed a fanatic, a mere roving evangelist of no particular importance ; but the verdict of history is very different. To Wesley's essential greatness there is no more striking tribute than the increasing recognition that he receives from historians. Green finds Methodism, important as it is, to be the least product of the Evangelical Revival ; Lecky, the rationalist, acknowledges that the experience of Wesley in Aldersgate Street 'forms an epoch in English history' ; and now a Frenchman, Professor Halévy, who is puzzled to explain how England, politically and socially chaotic as she was, escaped ruin and revolution after the Napoleonic wars, finds the solution in John Wesley and his followers.

In fact, as time goes on it becomes more and more apparent that Wesley was the most conspicuous and most influential figure of his century. Most of his contemporaries—people of importance in their own time—are forgotten, while he has become so great that friends and relatives, often of no importance at all, are immortalized because they had something to do with John Wesley. Even the infant children of his brother Samuel have their memorial in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey because they were children, as the memorial slab records, of Samuel, *brother of John Wesley*. And to-day, as Mr. Lloyd George said in a famous speech at City Road, no man exercises a greater influence in the Anglo-American world, and the lack of a Wesley on the continent of Europe is a deplorable fact of history. There can, indeed, be little doubt that the Englishman of the eighteenth century who mattered most to the world was neither politician nor poet, neither soldier nor sailor, but the little itinerant on horseback—the Great Equestrian, as I would call him —who is still riding on to new conquests.

# Part II

# THE REDISCOVERY OF GOD

'We believe, and therefore also we speak.'
—St. Paul.

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# V

## THE ORIGINALITY OF THE WESLEYS

If it is asked whether John Wesley was a spiritual discoverer; whether he really added anything to the world's knowledge of God or of truth; whether he was in any sense an original thinker; whether he left behind him a body of doctrine which lives?—the answer is 'Yes and No.'

It is quite true that Wesley contributed nothing of value to a formal philosophy of religion. He is not likely to be often quoted as a theological authority. No one classifies him with Clement of Alexandria, Anselm, Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, Calvin, and Butler. He cannot be called a great speculative thinker. His practical temper made him suspicious and even disdainful of speculations. 'I would not,' he writes to his brother Charles in 1780, 'read over Dr. Watts's tract for a hundred pounds. You may read it and welcome. I will not, dare not, move those subtle, metaphysical controversies. Arianism is not in the question; it is Eutychianism or Nestorianism. But what are they? What neither I nor any one else understands.'[1] And later of a treatise by the same author he wrote to Joseph Benson, 'Some years since I read about fifty pages of Dr. Watts's ingenious treatise upon the "Glorified Humanity of Christ." But it so confounded my intellects, and plunged me into such unprofitable reasonings, yea, dangerous ones, that I would not have read it through for five hundred pounds.'[2] Whatever may be said of those extracts as illustrating the practical temper of Wesley, they are certainly not the sentiments of a speculative mind, and in the

[1] *W. W.* XII. 137. [2] *W. W.* XII. 402.

sense in which men like Butler or Locke were thinkers, it is quite true to say that Wesley was not a thinker. Whatever tastes he had in such directions, he deliberately suppressed. And he has left behind him nothing original in the world of speculative thought.

But he was a spiritual discoverer. He had first-hand knowledge of the living Lord. He did not move in a world of curious speculations and ingenious opinions, but in a world of fact. He is far removed from the atmosphere of quotation, authorities, nice balance of probabilities, in which he had been bred; he lived amongst realities he experienced and saw others experiencing. He despised no knowledge and acquired all he could. He thought and let think, but his judgements are experimental, vital, and practical. He believed that the best way of knowing the doctrine was to do the will, the way to learn of God was to practise what he knew of God. A man who thought and reasoned about everything, who was of an entirely rational temperament, with an almost credulous belief in the power of a syllogism to establish truth, he nevertheless felt that religion was not first of all truth, but life. No intellectual ever felt this more keenly than Wesley, and his emphasis on the relative values of life and doctrine was one of his most important contributions to sound theological reasoning. He had the true perspective. Life is more than biology—and vital Christianity than theology. There is no greater delusion than the notion that Christianity is *primarily* a system of theological tenets—or abstract truths. Christianity at its centre is life. Wesley knew this, and discovered that Christianity could only be understood by experiment. Life and experiment must come first, and general truths deduced from ascertained facts, although, of course, the life is the truth and the way; but, apart from experimentation, a man however learned is but a blind leader of the blind. The originality of Wesley is that he experimented with reality, and found it by coming into

contact with God. He discovered by means of his experience the stuff of which his teaching and conduct are the fruits. From his experience issued the teaching and practice which are of abiding value to the human race.

Wesley's value as an original spiritual personality is in the positive character of his witness and the constructive character of his service. Negative and critical teaching and speculative reasoning have their values, but they are not primary. What is needed in religion first of all is valid experience of God. Nothing else can make Christian teaching vital. The fundamental fact of Wesley's life and work, teaching and preaching, was his positive witness. He *knew* in whom he had believed. The force of his testimony no doubt was greatly enhanced by the fact that he was a man of culture, a keen logician, a recognized intellectual. For while the genuine testimony of an illiterate Christian is as good evidence of Christianity as any other man's, his powers of expression are not ; nor will people listen to him so readily. Wesley once said, writing to his brother Charles in reference to a fanatical Methodist, 'Oh, for light and heat united!'[1] He really blended the two in himself. Contemporary attempts to discredit Wesley's testimony on the grounds of enthusiasm would have obviously been more effective, but for his Oxford fellowship. To revert to a metaphor used earlier, all his culture, training, and discipline in youth and early manhood made his intellect and personality comparable to a well-laid fire which only needed a match to set it alight. The flame spread and grew because the fuel of which the fire was composed was such excellent material. Certain appreciations of the Aldersgate Street experience, which depreciate the value of the preceding years of Wesley's life, are quite valueless. The later and earlier Wesleys were not two discontinuous personalities. The man set afire at Aldersgate Street was just ready to be set afire. There has been no man in Christian history whose

[1] *W. W.* XII. 118.

gifts and culture made a richer offering to God than John Wesley. He was the man God needed in the eighteenth century. God plucked him from the burning rectory, and so shaped his character through the intervening years that he might set him on fire in Aldersgate Street. By God's grace such a candle was then lighted as will never be put out.

Not only did Wesley enter into vital religious experience himself, but he was singularly fitted both by intellect and sympathy to understand the experience of others. He gave many accounts in his writings of the experiences of unlearned and ignorant men. He realized their value, and knew he was dealing in these human experiences with the real stuff of religion as he could not in books and opinions. Much of his doctrine of Christian perfection was deduction from the definite experiences of perfect love communicated to him by his own humble people. In this sense he was a psycho-analyst before his time, with this additional value —that his authentic personal experiences qualified and illuminated his critical judgement.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of Wesley's Aldersgate experience, for it was that luminous moment which made God real to him. The by-products of the evangelical experience are to be found in literature and social and political life, for ' wherever the river goes, there is life,' but they will be discussed later—they are only mentioned here as confirming the immense importance of the ' quickening ray,' which warmed John Wesley's heart. Here, then, we get at the originality of Wesley, and the founts of originality from which such invigorating streams have flowed.

## VI

## THE STORY OF THE DISCOVERY

WHAT sprang from the evangelical experience of the eighteenth-century Methodists is so important that it is valuable to examine carefully the spiritual discovery, not only of John Wesley, but of his brother Charles. John and Charles Wesley threw off the bondage of servants for the freedom of the children of God in the same week in May 1738. Their essential experiences were identical, and Charles Wesley sung in his hymns what John felt and preached. John and Charles Wesley must be considered together. Their memorial tablet in Westminster Abbey with the medallion carving of both faces is a true verdict on their lives and mission. Charles complemented John in an extraordinary way. The early hymns were published under the names of both brothers ; they were the joint authors of the hymns which went far to make early Methodism ; the attribution of nearly all the original hymns to Charles is highly probable though not quite certain, but the experience of the great conversion hymns is the experience of both brothers, and their conversion was nearly simultaneous, although Charles entered into the light a few days before John. So closely were the two brothers connected that, if they had lived a few centuries earlier, Dr. Rendel Harris might have used them as another illustration of the Dioscuri and called them ' Heavenly Twins.'

Charles Wesley at the time of his conversion was in very bad health. He was lodging at the house of a poor ignorant mechanic named Bray, ' who knows nothing but Christ, yet by knowing Him, knows and discerns all things,' and was

in bed sick. 'Bray,' says Charles Wesley, 'took the place of Böhler praying that I might have faith.' For some time Charles had attended, along with John and Böhler and the Hutton's, a little Society which used to meet at Mr. Hutton's shop in Little Wild Street, afterwards in Fetter Lane, where the company was seeking after God and experimental religion. Charles Wesley already believed in the doctrine of justification by faith only, as being that on which the Church of England was founded, but he had no experience of its meaning. At the beginning of his illness, when he was temporarily staying at James Hutton's, Peter Böhler had visited him, praying over him, and this had turned him for some weeks to a new consideration of Böhler's doctrine of faith, examining himself as to whether he had it, and resolving, if he had not, 'never to cease longing and seeking after it, till he attained it.'

On May 17 he first saw Luther's *Commentary on the Galatians*, and by a strange but wonderful coincidence was, like John Bunyan in the previous century, greatly influenced by it. He spent some hours in private that day with Martin Luther, and at the conclusion of the second chapter was 'greatly blessed.' 'I laboured, waited, and prayed to feel "who loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*." When nature, near exhausted, forced me to bed, I opened the book upon "For He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness, because short work will the Lord make upon earth." After this comfortable assurance that the Lord would come and would not tarry, I slept in peace.'

On the following days conversation with a good woman and Mr. Bray's reading of Scripture strengthened him. He had a fresh attack of pleurisy on May 20. May 21 was Whit Sunday. John visited him at nine o'clock, they joined in a hymn to the Holy Ghost and prayed. Of a later hour he writes, 'I was composing myself to sleep, when I heard one come in and say, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise, and believe, and thou shalt be healed of all thy infirmities." '

The words struck him to the heart. He thought they had been spoken by a Mrs. Musprat, for whom he rung, only to find that she had not been in the room at all; but another woman, Mrs. Turner, confessed that she was the speaker, and said 'It was I, a weak, sinful creature, spoke, but the words were Christ's. He commanded me to say them and so constrained me that I could not forbear.' He sent for Mr. Bray, who told him that his sister, Mrs. Turner, had spoken these words, and she had dreamt that a man in white had knocked at the door and said, 'I am Jesus Christ.' Afterwards she was so uplifted into communion with Him, that she heard Him telling her to pronounce the words she spoke to Charles Wesley, lying sick in bed and needing God.

The words came home to Charles Wesley; he rose and looked at the Scriptures and came across three passages, which he read, the last of which was 'Comfort ye, Comfort ye, my people, saith your God.' And then he wrote in his journal: 'I now found peace with God and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ.' On the following Tuesday, he wrote a hymn telling what it meant for him, the hymn 'Where shall my wondering soul begin.'[1]

From some points of view this story is curious. The sceptic could easily criticize it as the experience of a morbid man, prone to superstitious practices, seeing in mere coincidence the hand of God, self-deceived into faith. But what about its fruits? It is interesting to compare it with John's experience, who had been driven by the sheer force of argument to believe in the doctrine of salvation by faith, and had cast off his prejudices against such a doctrine. He was actually preaching it and being expelled from churches already for doing so. He heard with amazement the story of his brother's conversion, and on May 24 he entered into a

[1] J. T. Lightwood (*Methodist Music of the Eighteenth Century*) argues that 'And can it be that I should gain,' was the hymn Charles Wesley wrote at this time. His argument, though ingenious, is not strong enough to dethrone the well-substantiated tradition affirmed above, nor the record of Charles Wesley's journal.

like experience, although he was disappointed by the lack of joy that followed it. May 24, 1738, is a memorable day for Christianity and England. What a sober progress John Wesley's *Journal* reveals.

'*Wednesday, May* 24.—Just as I went out I opened my New Testament on the words "Thou are not far from the kingdom of God." In the afternoon I was asked to go to St. Paul's. The anthem was—"Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice. O let Thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint. If Thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it? For there is mercy with Thee; therefore shalt Thou be feared. O Israel, trust in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his sins."

'In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the *Epistle to the Romans*. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.'

What a difference between Charles and John—the one with his voices, coincidences, joy, and hymn writing, the other calm, rational, with just a quiet strange glow in his heart after he had been influenced in the afternoon by an anthem at St. Paul's. But the same experience. The quiet glow of Wesley's heart was vivid enough to set England on flame. He always thought of his spiritual life as a fire from heaven; he told Samuel Bradburn when they were together in Yorkshire in 1781 that his experience might almost at any time be found in the two following verses.

O Thou who camest from above
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart!

There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze;
And trembling to its source return,
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Two days after his conversion, Charles Wesley wrote his first real hymn. His tongue was at once unloosened. John was the pioneer of Methodist hymnody, but after his conversion we have no knowledge of what original hymns he wrote, although he certainly wrote some. Perhaps it is another instance of his practical sagacity that, when he found his brother had such a gift, he left him to exercise it, and turned his own mind to other matters.

The hymn Charles wrote is the song of his own conversion —but it describes John's too—'a brand plucked from eternal fire,' and when John came to visit Charles on May 24, saying 'I believe! I believe!' they sang the hymn together. What emotions it still stirs in the hearts of Methodists who have not lost all imagination. The hymn gets to the very soul of the evangelical experience, and its last verses, written by an invalid who is already in imagination communicating his gospel to all sorts and conditions of men, are strangely prophetic, not only of Charles Wesley's mission, but even more of John's.

Well may he ask

Where shall my wondering soul begin?

and go on to sing:

O how shall I the goodness tell,
Father, which Thou to me hast showed?
That I, a child of wrath and hell,
I should be called a child of God,
Should know, should feel my sins forgiven,
Blest with this antepast of heaven!

That is the experience, the Methodist experience, and then there follows naturally the Methodist testimony; for such an experience Methodists cannot keep to themselves. The Methodist is no quietist, but a man who tells how great things the Lord hath done for him. Here his experience is set down in words which burn, in the very first dawn of the great day in Charles Wesley's life, before Methodism, as we know it, had begun to be:

> And shall I slight my Father's love?
> Or basely fear His gifts to own?
> Unmindful of His favours prove?
> Shall I, the hallowed cross to shun,
> Refuse His righteousness to impart,
> *By hiding it within my heart*?

And no sooner has he sung the words, which bring vividly to our minds a great cloud of witnesses (who in every part of the world have declared the goodness of the Lord for two centuries), than he becomes a flaming evangelist. And from his sick room shouts

> Outcasts of men, to you I call,
> Harlots, and publicans, and thieves!
> He spreads His arms to embrace you all,
> Sinners alone, His grace receives:
> . . . . . .
> He calls you now, invites you home;
> Come, O my guilty brethren, come!

The sublime genius of Charles Wesley has visualized the essence and history of Methodism within forty-eight hours of his conversion. No more extraordinary words in the light of history have ever been written than this first hymn[1] of the greatest of all singers of the gospel.

[1] Three so-called hymns are attributed to the earlier months of 1738; but ought these rather melancholy religious meditations to be called hymns? With the doubtful exception of a few verses, in the third of them, they were obviously not intended for public song. See *Poetical Works*, Vol. I., pp. 49, 73, 74.

On May 24 John and Charles Wesley sang this newly-written hymn together. What an opportunity for a Methodist Giotto. The picture has never yet been painted of that Evangelical duet. The two brothers, in the first glow of their new experience, singing together in the sick room of one of them, months before the Revival began, the appeal that would awaken England. That hymn was probably sung to the old Twenty-third Psalm tune, and the singing of it was the overture of the Evangelical Revival; it was the prelude of a New England.

A question has been raised as to whether this experience ought to be called conversion. John Wesley is sparing of the use of the word himself, thinking other words more scriptural. But there can be no doubt that it was the luminous moment in the lives of both the Wesleys which changed their whole outlook on life and opened up to them a new world, and Charles Wesley, describing his own experience, definitely calls it conversion.

His *Journal* reads:

> *Tuesday, May* 23.—'At nine I began an hymn upon *my Conversion.*'

Certain admirers of the early churchmanship of Wesley would emphasize Wesley's Christianity in his Oxford and Georgia period and find only an incidental experience in the conversion, minimizing its value, and even regretting the over-emphasis that has been placed upon it. Methodists on their part have under-estimated the true Christianity of his earlier days. But there can be no question of the contrast between the ritualist of 1737 and the evangelist of 1739, and it is difficult to think of any word more fit to describe it than conversion. Probably Wesley, according to Overton, would have preferred 'new birth.' Some of his high-church admirers might like that even less.

Now I claim that this experience was a re-discovery of

God. It is true that the same discovery had been made by others and that it was even largely communicated to Wesley by Peter Böhler. But it was not thought possible by the cultured England of Wesley, and was a dead doctrine amongst people who had any real influence on the life of the country. The children of the Puritans had lost the fervour of an earlier age, and even their fathers, although in some cases not lacking in a doctrine and experience of assurance, had not realized the rich meaning and scope of their experience, and, of course, disbelieved in its universal application. It matters in a great discovery that not only a good country is discovered, but that the discoverer has the power to see and use it. The discovery of the Wesleys was made by men remarkably gifted with the necessary endowments for exploration of the realms discovered, and their flash of vital experience made the difference. The more we examine what they found in their discovery, the more shall we realize its incalculable importance.

And in the sense that they went to the fountain-head of inspiration they were original, and that is what differentiated them from men of like powers with theirs since the days of Luther. The vital realities of religion must be discovered over and over again. Whole generations of men lose sight of them. And wherever a man enters into the experience of the Wesleys he has the thrill of discovery—personal discovery. He cries, Eureka! What rapture in St. John's great words: 'Herein is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His own Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' That is the discovery in the cross of Christ, of Love. love given and manifest in Jesus—God's love, not ours.

And so Charles Wesley expresses the same wonder and unutterable joy when he says:

> Amazing love! how can it be
> That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Amazing love!' What a discovery!

We are reminded of the joy of John Keats when he discovered for himself the Greek World of Homer :

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken,
> Or like stout Cortez—when with eagle eyes
> He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
> Looked at each other with a wild surmise,
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

John and Charles Wesley looked at each other with a wild surmise, and were not silent, but vocal, and they sang together,

> Outcasts of men, to you I call,
> Harlots, and publicans, and thieves!
> He spreads His arms to embrace you all;
> Sinners alone His grace receives.

## VII

## THE VALIDITY OF EVANGELICAL EXPERIENCE

The object of this book is to state the permanent historical values of the Evangelical Revival. These values obviously remain, however the experiences of the Revival be explained or explained away. And ultimately they are based on the illuminating spiritual discoveries of the Wesleys in May 1738, just as the entire history of Christianity is based on the belief of the early Christians that Jesus had risen from the dead. The historical results of those beliefs up to the present have not been affected by whether they were based on objective reality or upon illusions and hallucinations. If, however, the modern attempts to prove that there is no objective reality behind these experiences are successful, it is difficult not to think that not only Methodism, but Christianity itself, will be of diminishing value in the future. Before a closer examination is given of the content of the discovery of the Wesleys, and all the original thinking and organization that proceeded from it, it is necessary to give some attention to the validity of their experience and to the objections made against it.

Much has been written in recent years on the psychology of conversion. The pioneer in these inquiries was William James. The power of conversion to do what the orthodox claim for it he did not deny, but rather confirmed. He did not exclude the possibility of the 'direct presence of the Deity,' but he emphasized the working of subconscious activities, in which God Himself may share or may not. He regards as the most important step forward in modern psychology the discovery first made in 1886, viz. 'that not

only the consciousness in the ordinary field, with its usual centre and margins, but an addition thereto in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts, and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside the primary consciousness altogether, but yet must be classed as conscious facts of some sort, able to reveal their presence by unmistakable signs. I call this the most important step forward, because, unlike other advances which psychology has made, this discovery has revealed to us an entirely unsuspected peculiarity in the constitution of human nature.'[1] Since that time the activities of the subconscious and the subliminal self have been explored, and all sorts of theories, some of which are in the making and some of which are already repudiated, have resulted.

William James himself indicated what light might be thrown on religious experience by a better understanding of subconscious activity, and, although he was careful and undogmatic in expression, it cannot be denied that he suggested purely naturalistic explanations of conversion. Perhaps we may claim that it is important to distinguish between ' process ' and ' cause.' Mr. Dimond, in his excellent book *Psychology of the Evangelical Revival*, carefully guards his writing against this very common misunderstanding. ' When,' he writes, ' John Nelson cried, " Lord, Thy will be done, damn or save," and found himself immediately set free from self-despising and filled with boundless delight in life and love and God, his behaviour was no doubt conditioned by habits, memory, beliefs, and language mechanisms, but, though the true psychology which has nothing more to say may be scientifically accurate, it brings us no nearer to the meaning of his experience, and throws no light on the essential nature of the mental processes involved. It may be, religion can supply a terminology, and perhaps ultimate entities for psychology more consonant than " Behaviourism " with the facts.'[2]

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 233. [2] Dimond, p. 5.

The religious experience of human beings is, of course, human experience. But to say it is human experience, and to split it up into its component emotions and concepts, is only to label it, not to explain it. To stretch it out so that it can be examined precisely does not explain what set it to work. The psychologist and the evolutionist are both investigators of a process, but the process, by being clearly analysed and detailed, is not necessarily explained. The evolutionist who maps out the process from primordial slime to nordic manhood, and talks of the amoeba, the vertebrate, the anthropoid ape as stages *en route* to *homo sapiens*, and thence to modern man, has not explained what started the process. Even the theory of the special creationist that man was created in a few minutes out of a handful of dust does not deny that there was a process by which he became body and soul in those few minutes, only, according to him, God took less time than the evolutionist says was taken. Many people seem to think that a process, if lengthy enough, becomes a cause. So there is a danger, when the psychologist analyses the emotional and mental experiences of conversion, and splits them up into many fragments, of fear and anger and wonder and subconscious repressions and sublimations and suggestions and I know not what, that he imagines he has explained what he has dissected. It is the primal urge that matters.

The emotions are the track on which the experience runs. Sex feeling runs on some of the same tracks as religious feeling ; both express themselves by fear, anger, wonder, joy, silence, speech ; but it does not mean that they are identical experiences because they use the same tracks. The power of a woman over a man is not identical with that of God, but many of its emotional responses are the same, for the simple reason that a man is not equipped with two sorts of tears and two sorts of laughter, one for God and the other for a woman. Sacred and secular music use the same notes, but with different results.

But the serious modern attack on the validity of religious experience is through the theory of the subconscious. The term is so vague, and the vast areas of subconscious life so unexplored, if not unexplorable, that it is easy to get lost in them. After all, it must not be forgotten that to the actual consciousness of any given moment the subconscious belongs to the unconscious, and what part of the unconscious is subconscious, or potentially conscious, no one can say. Nor are the boundaries of the subconscious-self known. When, therefore, one talks of the influence of subconscious activities on a man, how far can any one say that he knows sufficient of those subconscious forces to calculate their effect with any accuracy? Must he not almost inevitably make his calculation without giving due weight to essential factors which he cannot know? Whatever the psychological findings of the study of subconsciousness, there must be much groping in 'the abysmal depths of personality' with comparatively small results. William James admits contact with God as possible in the subconscious life, nor can such an admission be disclaimed unless a man know all the factors of subconsciousness and find God absent! This he never can know. In the nature of the case, the psychology of the subconscious can never be exact science. At present it seems particularly attractive to minds of a romantic character.

Hence one reads, and ought to read with a sceptical mind, the attempts to explain psychological experience by subconscious processes. Psycho-analysis has given the world some excellent labels, but has it so far done much more? Labels are by no means to be despised, but they are not explanations.

Mr. Dimond uses psycho-analysis to explain the process of John Wesley's conversion. The subconscious forces which were at work in Wesley's mind, he claims, using well-known labels of the psycho-analysts, were repression, sublimation, suggestion. His love-affairs in Georgia suggest the sublimation

of Wesley's natural sensibility to female influences into a passion for God, and the almost simultaneous suggestions of the Moravians shaped the form of his conversion experience. I do not suppose that Mr. Dimond would argue—indeed, he has guarded himself against such an accusation—that this great spiritual revolution can be explained apart from God, but do the arguments and illustrations he propounds explain even the human process?

The Moravian teaching certainly counted; its influence can hardly even be called exclusively subconscious; but how many other teachings counted too? Perhaps Thomas à Kempis and St. Paul were subconscious influences—who can measure or count such influences? Mr. Dimond's case (which could be made explanatory of the whole conversion experience by the psycho-analysts) for the sublimation of sex passion is very unconvincing. There is no evidence that the intensity of Wesley's search for God was deepened by his disappointment in love. He got over that quickly. The alleged unsettlement and brooding of spirit after his love experience is more explicable on other grounds. His disciplinary extravagances had brought him into conflict with the civil arm. He was unpopular in Georgia. He had to leave and begin again in England. Surely this was enough to make him unsettled and gloomy. The events of that time must have depressed Wesley. His Georgia love-affair was always a struggle between love and vocation, and vocation won. If Wesley, as a man of the world, had turned from a disappointed love to religion, the case would be altered. But his diaries show no change in religious habit. After a bitter day or two, he apparently went on with his regular life much the same as before. For ten years he had been as religious as a man knew how to be. Sublimation of human passion seems a very inadequate account of his experience in Aldersgate Street.

I am not arguing that external forces, conscious and unconscious, had no influence on Wesley. Of course they

had, and, no doubt, however they are labelled, they must shape every human soul. Wesley would have said so himself. He considers the essence of 'enthusiasm' to be the seeking of an end without devising a means, and God undoubtedly comes to men on the route of their human personalities. Human personality is God's means to divine ends.

But nevertheless

> None knows the secret, cherished, perilous,
> The terrible, shamefast, frightened, whispered, sweet,
> Heart-shattering secret of His way with us.

So far as psychology or psycho-analysis helps us to understand the human mind and soul, it is no hindrance, but a help, to religion. Mr. Dimond's book, notwithstanding one's feeling of the occasional inadequacy of particular illustrations, is an excellent illustration of the way in which one can better understand the divine working in human nature. But the psychology of the subconscious is often used to minimize the value of religious experience. Freud's system, as well as being morbid in its sex obsession, is purely deterministic; it finds no place for God in the universe, and strives to explain all mystery and all impact on us of forces external to our own consciousness as being the senseless work of blind subconscious activities. That such experiences as Wesley's will be more and more subjected to psychological analysis, and be discredited in certain quarters, is sure to happen, but that its credibility will be permanently destroyed is not likely.

It is interesting to call to mind other criticisms of Wesley's experience. The eighteenth century put them down to 'enthusiasm.' Even William Law did not take them very seriously. Not a few people have criticized Wesley's credulity, and none more than Lecky, who censured him strongly for putting 'the whole weight of religious proof

upon what he termed " a new class of senses opened in the soul to be the avenues of the invisible world, the evidences of things not seen, as the bodily senses are of visible things." '[1] This statement of Lecky is hardly accurate. Wesley believed in other methods of proving religion than the one named. He once said, ' I believe and reason too, for I find no inconsistency between them. And I would as soon put out my eyes to secure my faith as lay aside my reason.'[2] Many thinkers of the twentieth century would probably agree, as to the acquisition of knowledge through other than bodily senses, rather with Wesley than Lecky, William James being among them. ' Stigmatizations, invulnerabilities, instantaneous cures, inspired discourse, and demoniacal possessions, the records of which were shelved in our libraries but yesterday in the alcove headed " Superstition," now, under the brand-new title of " Cases of Hystero-epilepsy," are republished, re-observed, and reported with an even too credulous avidity.'[3]

The evangelical experience was regarded as hallucination, fanaticism, and the like by the learned sceptics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the twentieth it would be accepted as a valid subjective experience, but explained away as the result of subconscious activities. But that the experience should be really what its subjects claimed it to be—of God in Christ quickening, illuminating, and re-creating the soul—will always be denied, so long as denial seems arguable, by those who have not received it by faith.

Lecky and Southey have especially noted the credulity of Wesley in various directions—his belief in ghosts, witchcraft, supernatural visions, and the like—so as to throw doubt on his credibility as a witness. The credulity of Wesley of course existed, but it has been absurdly exaggerated. His calm rationality is his most striking

[1] Lecky: *History of England*, Vol. III., p. 137. [2] *W. W.* X. 267.
[3] William James: *The Will to Believe*, p. 302.

characteristic. But it must not be forgotten that times of such great religious stirrings as those of Wesley create an acute sensibility to things unseen, and perhaps the incredulous man misses more truths than the credulous man accepts falsehoods. A man like Wesley, living in such constant communion with God, was likely to be sensitive in some directions where others were not. Whatever Wesley's credulity, it was not expressed in his very rational search for salvation, which was crowned by his liberating experience.

It is also sometimes asked, Was their experience lasting? Both brothers had doubts and fears afterwards, as their *Journals* record. John, five months after his conversion, said he was not a Christian at all. And in January of 1739 he seems again to write as if he had lost his experience. Tyreman, in his life of Wesley, finds the inconsistencies of John's *Journal* almost insoluble difficulties. Why should he? Did he never know of men who have passed from mountain summits to valleys of humiliation, and he a Methodist too? Canon Overton, the high churchman, understands the case much better when he writes of the almost despairing record of January 4, 1739.

'This, however, was the last outbreak; henceforth during the whole of his long life hardly the shadow of a doubt about his spiritual state crossed his path; clouds and darkness constantly swept over his outer life, but there was perpetual and unclouded sunshine within.'

Is Wesley's testimony a credible account of his experience? Did he really get into touch with things unseen? Surely the fruits of his work are some evidence for the truth of his claims. Moreover, his experience was one he could proclaim and communicate. It was soon shown by thousands who made spiritual experiment successfully, and lived afterwards in the light of God's face, that it was an experience which all men could share. The world has known many hypocrites and madmen who have made supernatural claims, and it may

be excused if it examines such discoveries as those of the Wesleys with careful scrutiny. But fifty years of apostolic toil convinced most men that the Wesleys knew in whom they believed, and two hundred years of history, enriched by the fruit of their faith, are crammed with evidence, not only of their sincerity and zeal, but of the truth of the experimental gospel they preached.

In discussing the validity of the Wesleys' experience, it must never be forgotten that the doctrine of assurance was guarded from its obvious dangers of self-deception and morbid introspection by Wesley himself. No one was less inclined to credit the extravagant claims of mystics, and no one was more aware of the perils of sheer individualism, which might arise out of an unrelated experience of the individual soul. 'The Church is not a heterogeneous collection of unrelated individuals; it is a unity animated and controlled by the one life of the Spirit.'[1] Wesley claimed that Christianity was a Social Religion, and his class-meetings were organized for collective experience. They checked the extravagances of individual experience on the one hand, and on the other enriched defective experience. One of the reasons that Wesley never failed to insist on the importance of the Ancient Services and Sacraments of the Church was that they embodied the collective experience of centuries. Wesley believed that experience was no less experience because it happened to be corporate.

One of the earliest results of the psychological study of religion was to bring into prominence the argument from experience. Sometimes this experience is stated with a *naïveté* which suggests that the subjective experience guarantees the truth of the experient's explanation of it.[2] Common sense certainly would come to the conclusion that, if a man had an experience of Jesus Christ, there was such a person as Jesus Christ, actually in communication with

[1] *N. H. M.*, Workman, p. 29.
[2] See Waterhouse: *Philosophy of Religious Experience*, p. 29.

human beings, who could be experienced. Common sense judgements in other matters, however, have been proved to be wrong. The sky at night looks like a star-spangled dome ; the sun seems to set. But the statement of common sense that these things have been experienced by multitudes does not prevent the scientists from saying the multitudes were mistaken, and from giving new statements of the common experience satisfactory, when understood, to every one. Is it not possible, it is asked, that religious experience is to be explained as purely subjective ?

But the illustrations of sunset and like natural phenomena are only partially analogous. Whatever be the explanation of the sunset, the fact remains that our experience is of something objective. The objectivity of the experience is not challenged by the scientific explanation. But it is just the objectivity of the evangelical experience that is challenged. The experience could not exist unless there were a belief in its objectivity. So the very experience does in some sense depend on the statement of it. It is quite impossible to seek God as a phase of one's own subjectivity. If there be nothing objective in the evangelical experience, there is no escape ultimately from the conclusion that all professors of it have been the victims of hallucination. The assumption that God is a person, objective to one's own consciousness, is either false or true. If false, all evangelical and, indeed, all religious experience of God is delusion ; but if true, the only possible witnesses of its truth are those who have experience of God. Hence the lack of such experience on the part of those who have not complied with the necessary conditions of sharing it will never greatly influence those who have. Neither their intellectuality nor their learning will make much impression on the mind of experients. Why should they ? There can be no reason *a priori* why men should not have contact with a living God —if there is a God who lives and loves—and the fact that millions of men, of unquestionable integrity and in some

cases of the highest intellectual power, say they had such an experience can hardly be overturned by the people who apply methods of analysis to this alleged experience which belong to other realms of thought, but who have not themselves sought it by the way of penitence and faith, the way by which the experients themselves declare they found it. Furthermore, the second-hand discussion of the experiences of other people cannot have the value of the testimony of persons of equal trustworthiness and intelligence who have had direct experience. Here again the analogies of the natural world fail because the scientist has witnessed a sunset as often as the agricultural labourer, but the evangelical Christian has an experience to which the psychologist who tries to explain it is often quite blind.

The conversion experience was the experience of a discovery. It was not mere subjectivity. It was an experience of objective spiritual realities shared by two men. It was not created out of their inner consciousness; neither was it the result of introspection. It was a communicable experience, which they communicated to others, who made a like discovery.

Of course, it is true that the experience of the Spirit cannot be demonstrated by the evidence of the senses, but, when supported by the spiritual experience of innumerable other people, it is idle to ignore its claim to be objective. The only valid witnesses are those who have shared the experience, and the tests to which they can be subjected are their general credibility as witnesses and the fruits of their experience. An objective spiritual world unrealizable by the senses and cognizable by faith is plainly assumed by the experience of the Methodists. God broke through on them as He did on Paul on his way to Damascus. While this can never be exactly demonstrated to people who lack the experience, it is confirmed by millions who have shared it. And testimony as to fact in such cases is the only evidence that, in the nature of the case, could be

confirmatory. After all, the simplest explanation is the best, and that is that they sought God and they found Him. And it was because they discovered for themselves His grace and mercy in the cross of His Son, and for no other reason, that a fire was kindled that set the world aflame.

## VIII

## 'EXPERIENTIA DOCET'

WHAT was the content of the new experience of the Wesleys? The two explorers had found a new world; the light of God which shone upon them made all things new; what did they find in that new world? Did they discover anything worth discovering? Some things that they found are quite plain. They found peace—they found the unification of their own personalities; they were assured of their personal salvation; they soon found radiant, exuberant joy; they found God's love in Christ as an experience of their own, and gloried in their discovery of such 'amazing love'; they found an impulse for evangelism which was never exhausted; they found liberty of spirit for themselves and called on all men to share in their emancipation. They found treasures they could communicate, and, as Charles Wesley's hymn,

> Where shall my wondering soul begin,

shows, from the first they visualized and accepted their evangelical mission to mankind. All that is clear from the beginning.

But as they explored the new country into which they had entered, did they find anything more? Their whole life was given to exploration of that heavenly realm, and their principal discovery was the unlimited and unqualified love of God for everybody.

Dr. Scott Lidgett says: 'The meaning of Methodism is that it recovered by experience and set forth by its preaching and teaching the supremacy of the love of God.'[1] The

[1] *N.H.M.* II. 429.

great discovery is expressed in the greatest hymn of the revival :

> The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
> Pure, universal love Thou art ;
> To me, to all, Thy mercies move :
> Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

The implications and fruitfulness of their discovery were inexhaustible. This discovery, as it became known, created a revolution in religious thinking. The impact of God's discovered love on their souls illuminated the doctrine of justification by faith, and gave it a new emphasis—indeed, brought it to life again. It created a doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit different in some respects from that of the Reformation, and, perhaps more important than all, laid solid foundations for a sound doctrine of Christian perfection, and gave an impulse to social activities and philanthropies not yet exhausted because inexhaustible, and in the long run it destroyed the Calvinist doctrine of the Decrees. In a word, their spiritual discovery brought to light great truths imperfectly seen, if in their times seen at all, and revivified a body of theology which was almost dead.

Now it is here and here alone that we can discover the original contributions of the Wesleys to life and thought ; and, instead of being disappointed that John Wesley was not a speculative thinker, let us thank God that he was a practical one, who did more than any man, at all events since the Reformation, to open up realms to the people who gave heed to his message, not of cloudy speculation, but of solid, verifiable reality.

All that the Wesleys said of permanent value to the human race came out of their evangelical experience. All their distinctive doctrine was discovered in that realm of the Spirit which had been supernaturally opened and revealed to them in May 1738. ' Methodist doctrine affords a good illustration of the truth that man lives first and thinks afterwards. All

the distinctive features of Methodist thought and tendency have their roots in a characteristic experience. Both in the theological writings of John Welsey and in the hymns of Charles there is emotion recollected in tranquillity. And some of the hymns possess the quality of incantation ; the almost magical power of the inspired phrase to reproduce in the reader the moment experienced by the poet and reflected by the poem. That is one reason for the vitality of the Methodist evangel in its standard utterances ; so closely does the poetic or imaginative form convey the vivid intensity of actual experience.'[1]

There was, of course, much in their teaching that did not come out of their experience, but that is the commonplace and, to some extent, misleading part of it. What they received from tradition, where it was good, did not bite like the truths illuminated by their personal discovery, because the assent they gave to it was 'notional' and 'not real,' or it may even sometimes have been mischievous because unexplored or incorrectly related to what they had discovered. Their doctrines may be roughly classified as :

(1) Doctrines they formulated out of their experience, and doctrines they revived by their experience.

(2) Doctrines they quoted from other authorities.

Speculative theology and abstract thinking was not their forte. What counted was the truth they deduced from their glowing experience. That they were men of genius of course gave them the power of visualizing and expressing in forceful language what they experienced, and what many other souls experienced dimly, but could not express. The Wesleys voiced what others felt.

In this they had fellowship with the great Christian thinkers who have most forcefully shaped Western Christianity—Paul, Augustine, and Luther. The valid experience

[1] Dimond, p. 225.

of conscious contact with God, which these great men shared with the evangelical leaders, expressed itself in their characteristic doctrines. They have exercised a much wider and deeper influence than mere speculative thinkers, however able. Augustine was more of a formal theologian, it is true, than the other three, but the influence of his conversion on his career and thinking is obvious. The similarities of Paul, Luther, and Wesley have often been described. Paul and Luther were, perhaps, more volcanic personalities than John Wesley, but the artificiality of the eighteenth century moulded John Wesley in one direction, just as the volcanic character of the sixteenth shaped Martin Luther in another. But the practical character of their religion, the liberating evangelical experience, the reflection on the experience and the deduction made from it, and its correlation with and illumination of the body of truth they had received from others is characteristic of these three great leaders. It is also true of all of them that they were less successful in the teaching they gave about matters not illuminated by their experience.

Dr. Alexander Whyte wrote of certain published sermons of Lancelot Andrewes : ' that the magnificent doctrine never kindled the preacher, never gave him wings, never carried him away, *never fused nor took the slag out of his style.*'

There is slag in Paul, Luther, and Wesley—and the slag is that in them which was not fused and fired by their experience. Critics of Paul have not been slow to complain of his rabbinical methods, his antiquated exegesis, and any reader of Luther will realize how his controversial method gets the better of his judgement, if not of his Christianity at times, and Wesley's treatment of some theological subjects is jejune and uninteresting ; but when these men deal with their own experience, and the deductions they made from it, and the illumination it cast on all sorts of problems —theological, intellectual, ethical, and social—they are the great outstanding teachers of Western Christendom.

The value of Paul, for instance, for religious thought was his vivid experience ; he was awakened, illuminated, and liberated by the experience of the Damascus Road. Christ in the good pleasure of God was revealed in him. A man who had tried to the best of his ability to keep the ' Law ' which he honoured and loved was conscious of failure, and what he could not do on his own strength, he was enabled to do through the Christ of his experience. A sincere but misguided man was definitely arrested by the divine hand on a journey he was making for the purpose of doing wrong in the name of God, and his feet were turned into the way of God's commandments. His experience was so vivid that his whole life was transformed in a moment. A doubtful, struggling, unhappy man became the obedient servant and follower of Jesus, whom he knew not after the flesh, like Peter and John, but after the spirit, like men of our own day. The account that psychology gives us of these experiences makes no difference to the data which are fortunately so plain as to be unmistakable. The imperfect servant became a loving son of God and cried, ' Abba ! Father.' The persecutor became the persecuted ; the moral struggler, a proud man goaded by his defeats, became triumphant in Christ, in whom he can do all things. A man of culture, Jewish and Pagan, he is willing to learn from uneducated Nazarenes. His experience is a fact, and an experience of the fact that God had intervened in his life. He reflects on the traditional doctrine of his race, on the opinions in which he had been educated, but most of all he reflects on his own experience, and its contents, and accepts or rejects everything else in so far as it can or cannot be shaped into consistency with the central fact of his life. Paul discarded theories, however venerable, when they conflicted with his experience and the truths illuminated by it, and new theories were formed often enough out of the old material. ' Paul,' as T. R. Glover says, ' was a son of fact.' And the central fact for Paul was the Christ he knew—for him to live was Christ.

A recent writer has said that St. Paul seems to be thinking of his own conversion when he writes, 'God proves His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. St. Paul may be laying down doctrine, but it is doctrine based on personal experience. He scarcely thought of the death of Christ as a fact of history; rather it was an event in religious experience. Suddenly there had dawned upon the apostle an intense conviction of the love which God gave to man, insomuch as He had for their sakes given up His beloved Son to a cruel death. This conviction had the power which love, as supreme among the emotions, has in all noble natures, to break the ties of habit, of prejudice, and of indolence, and to carry one away on a flood of emotion to a new life.'[1]

Now, however true that statement may be, is it made as Paul would have made it? Would he have said that it was his *conviction* about Christ that brought about such results? Would he not rather have said that it was *Christ himself* who set him free? He was apprehended by Christ, known of Christ, constrained by the love Christ gave him, and was persuaded that nothing could separate him from that love. Paul's experience was an experience of facts—objective facts in the spiritual realm. The facts made the conviction, and the conviction could not have existed apart from the facts. Writers about Paul have no right to call his convictions experiences if they deny the objective character of the events he says he experienced.

Now out of that experience Paul formulated the truths which are central for evangelical religion. How did he, for instance, work out his doctrine of salvation through faith? He had to harmonize his experience of happy liberty and sonship with the fact that he had not kept the Law when he tried, however much he tried. Once he was miserable because of his failure, now he is quite happy; the love of God is shed abroad in his heart—he can do the things of which he was

[1] Percy Gardner: *The Religious Experience of St. Paul*, p. 32.

incompetent before. What is the explanation of the difference? He finds it in Christ crucified. He finds in the Cross both the righteousness and the love of God. And he formulates a doctrine to justify his own experience both to his intellect and his conscience, and to help other people to be saved by faith.

Paul's doctrines, when the experience that made them is missing, are barren theories. Men like Luther and Wesley feel their force because they have in their own experience the same knowledge of God's love out of which the doctrines were framed. These men confirm Paul's doctrine by their own experience. The figures in which the doctrine may be expressed in another age may differ from the Pauline metaphor suitable for his own, but the experience recurs, and relates itself to the Cross of Calvary. Hundreds of barren volumes on the atonement and justification have been written by speculative theologians, but Paul's burning words, 'He loved me and gave Himself for me,' continue to live and flame—and Luther heard them for himself, and re-echoed them so loudly that Bunyan heard them in the seventeenth century and Charles Wesley in the eighteenth. They are a great theology in themselves, born of a burning experience.

It was not the humanist Erasmus, the brilliant mocker of monkish folly, the great Renaissance editor of the Greek Testament, the pious epicure, interested in wine and pictures as well as truth, the man of fine culture, with a pen much more brilliant than rough Luther's and an intellect much more cultivated—it was not Erasmus who made the Reformation. He had no experience that moulded and transformed him. But it was Luther who sought and struggled and wept and fasted until at last God's love broke in upon him, and he accepted the grace that was given him by faith, and not earned by his tears and his struggles. The newly liberated man made the old doctrines live, and formulated out of his own experience and his knowledge of Paul's his doctrine of Justification. He also shook the world.

Few scenes in the life of Wesley are more interesting than his interview with the great Joseph Butler, then Bishop of Bristol. Butler evidently regarded him as a fanatical enthusiast, and said, 'You have no business here; you are not commissioned to preach in this diocese. Therefore I advise you to go hence.'

Wesley replied: 'My lord, my business on earth is to do what good I can. Wherever, therefore, I think I can do most good, there must I stay, as long as I think so. At present I think I can do most good here; therefore, here I stay.'[1]

A curt dismissal—and a quick reply! Butler was a great man. His *Analogy of Religion*, a sober and learned book, was unanswerable in his own day. Wesley must have seemed to his contemporaries very slight in comparison with Butler. Butler was entirely anxious to persuade men to seek God, but it was Wesley who succeeded in persuading them. Wesley has written nothing that can compare in profundity and originality with Butler's *Analogy* and *Sermons*, but Wesley had the evangelical experience of religion. His teaching was not formal, but it was vital. Charles Wesley turned it into thrilling song, and after all Butler wrote nothing comparable with Charles Wesley's hymns. The doctrines proved by experience, and forged out of experience, did, as they always do, what the ablest doctrine, apart from experience, is incapable of doing. When Butler lay dying at Durham, it is said he was in distress of soul, and said to his chaplain that, notwithstanding his efforts to live a good life, he was afraid to die. 'My lord,' said the chaplain, 'you have forgotten that Jesus Christ is a Saviour.' 'True,' was the answer, 'but how shall I know that He is a Saviour for me?' 'My lord, it is written, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."' 'True,' said the Bishop, 'and I am surprised that though I have read that Scripture a thousand times over, I never felt its virtue till this moment; and now I die happy.'

[1] *W. J.* II. 257.

What would have happened if Butler had entered into this experience before he wrote the *Analogy*? A similar story is told of Thomas Aquinas on his death-bed. He felt, as a consequence, that what he had written was nothing to what he then realized.

It is interesting, even if it is unfruitful, to speculate on what might have been, and one cannot help but feel that the simple evangelical experience would have given these two great theologians a power for good incalculable but certain, and much greater than anything with which their splendid gifts endowed them.

It must be admitted that vitalizing doctrine in his printed works is less apparent with John Wesley than with Luther, and much less than with Paul. But it must never be forgotten that the sermons and journals, tracts and discourses, of John Wesley are not the only literary expression of the Evangelical Revival. John Wesley's true medium of literary expression was preaching. A true preacher is more than a sermon-maker. The sermons he has left behind him are only the skeletons which his personality vivified, and clothed with living flesh. A great preacher like Wesley, capable of moving multitudes as few men ever have done, never depends for his results on the words he writes. His power is personal, and often momentary. His influence is difficult to describe. The spell he casts is realized at the time and only half remembered by those who were captured by it, and very difficult to analyse. The personal equation is the most potent fact of a great preacher's preaching—and his printed words are always incapable of perpetuating the magnetic sway he exercised when he spoke them. The published sermons of some great orators make one wonder why any one should have listened to them—Whitefield's, for instance. Furthermore, it must be remembered that, much as Wesley wrote, writing was not his supreme medium of expression. It was by organization, as it will be shown, that he gave perpetual force to his message. He made out of his organization what

other geniuses make out of their books. John Wesley's literary style was terse, clean, logical, and effective ; but he had no wings, only feet. The true literary medium of the Evangelical Revival was the hymns of Charles Wesley. Of these hymns Dr. James Martineau, the philosopher, Unitarian though he was, wrote : 'After the Scriptures, the Wesley Hymn-Book appears to me the grandest instrument of popular religious culture that Christendom has ever produced.'

The doctrines John taught in his sermons and books, Charles sang in his hymns. John's writings are strong but pedestrian, and Charles's are strong but winged. It is my purpose to illustrate the doctrines of the great discovery, not only by John Wesley's writings, but perhaps more fully by Charles Wesley's hymns.

And, after all, what medium is so suitable for theology as verse. The formulated creeds are always bursting through their formulas ; great faiths cannot be caged, they need to fly. No creed carefully formulated by ancient Greek logicians goes to the heart or mind of men like the 'Te Deum,' which is, after all, a hymn sung to the Holy Trinity about the Trinity. It is a sung creed. The songs of the Methodists were marching songs of victory, shouts of liberty, and they still stir men to great deeds and confirm them in their holy faith. Is there in religious history a partnership of men of genius so remarkable as that of the Wesleys? Statesman and poet, each in his own way supreme, joined together in cordial fellowship to achieve the divine purpose in the world.

# IX

## THE DOCTRINES OF THE DISCOVERY

THE experimental doctrines of the Evangelical Reviva which stand out prominently are three in number: God's unqualified love for all mankind, the witness of the Spirit, and Perfect Love. The spiritual experience of the Wesleys gave a particular stamp to each of these doctrines. The Wesleyan doctrine of the witness of the Spirit differs somewhat from that of the Reformation, and the doctrine of Perfect Love is, as Dr. R. W. Dale suggested, a special inheritance of Methodism.

The central doctrine of Methodism is defined in the words of Charles Wesley's greatest hymn, 'Pure Universal Love Thou art,' which means that God's love manifested in the Cross, discoverable by experience, is universal, and belongs, without restriction, qualification, or limitation, to the whole human race. No sin on my part makes any difference to the fact of God's love to me. No choice on His part elects one man and rejects another. His rain, His sunshine, and His love are for just and unjust alike. This was the central declaration of the Wesleys, and its correlative was that every man could be saved. There was hope for everybody.

This was new doctrine to the man of Wesley's day. If it had been declared earlier—and it probably had by such a man as Francis of Assisi, and others—it was now declared with the vigour of the Evangelical Revival, and never offered with such overpowering zeal as by Wesley and his followers. Charles Wesley sang the message a hundred times.

> Thy ceaseless, unexhausted love,
> Unmerited and free.

Its streams the whole creation reach,
So plenteous is the store;
Enough for all, enough for each,
Enough for evermore.

And, as Dr. Scott Lidgett points out, 'The discovery of the love of God gives the key-note to Wesley's preaching.' A chance reference to almost any page of his *Journals* will prove the truth of this assertion. Such statements as the following are scattered throughout them:

'I offered about a thousand souls the free grace of God; I called to them in the words of the evangelical prophet, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." Everywhere the emphasis is on the universal love of God.'[1]

The religious people of Wesley's days in England were Calvinists. Most of the population, both in Church and outside it, was not religious, and the Church of England was more concerned with moral than theological ideals—that has always been at once its weakness and strength. Where religion showed any signs of smouldering fervour, it was Calvinistic. Arminianism was confined to the Rationalistic Divines of the Church of England, who had nothing to say except live decently, and preached no gospel which told a man how to do so. John Nelson, in describing his search for peace of soul in the Churches of the time, rejected the Nonconformists, because 'Alas! their religion lay in notions,' and criticized Anglican preaching for its mere morality. The 'notions,' one may assume, were Calvinistic 'notions.'

Now the Calvinism of the time was no doubt in some of its applications a perversion of Calvin's teaching, but the doctrine of the decrees of Predestination and Reprobation logically tend to immorality. How could people to whom the uselessness of good conduct was preached care for morals? Wesley, on practical grounds, was opposed to Calvinism, and, although there may be something in Dr. Workman's argument that Wesley's Arminianism is the

[1] *N. H. M.*, Scott Lidgett, II. 629.

heritage Methodism received from Archbishop Laud,[1] it is true nevertheless that Wesley's logical mind, combined with his experience of God's love and his practical sense of conduct would in any case have been quite certain to have made him hostile to the doctrine of the decrees.

What really killed Calvinism in England was the Wesleys' personal discovery of God's amazing love. John Wesley preached his famous sermon on Free Grace on April 29, 1739, to which Charles Wesley's hymn on 'Universal Redemption' was appended. Both hymn and sermon gave great offence to Whitefield, who wrote a protesting letter to Wesley, copies of which were maliciously circulated soon after in the Foundery. Wesley read the letter to the congregation assembled, and then, with a dramatic gesture, tore it into fragments, an example which his congregation followed with their own copies.

Wesley jeopardized his friendship with Whitefield rather than be false to his great discovery. This sermon was a vigorous denunciation of predestination, and a piece of trenchant reasoning.

'This is the blasphemy clearly contained *in the horrible decree* of predestination. You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by Scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the Devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it never can prove this; whatever its true meaning be, it cannot be this meaning. No Scripture can mean that God is not love, or that His mercy is not over all His works; that is, whatever it prove beside, no Scripture can prove predestination.'[2] Now this is interesting, not only for what it declares, but for what it implies as to Wesley's feeling about Scripture. It implies in the last analysis that Scripture itself must be interpreted by the central fact of his experience—the love of God which he knew to be true, for he had discovered it

[1] *N. H. M.* 36. [2] *W. W.* VII. 365.

for himself. The ironical hymns of Charles Wesley on the horrible decree were even fiercer than John's sermon. It would be difficult to find words more biting than the terse verses in which Charles Wesley reduces the Calvinistic doctrine of the decrees to an absurdity by showing what is really implied by the horrible decree of Reprobation :

> To damn for falling short
> Of what they could not do,
> For not believing the report
> Of that which was not true.[1]

The irony is not less severe in a hymn in which he set out a summary of the crimes he *could* commit, leading up as a climax of wickedness to a belief in current Calvinism.

> I *could* the devil's law receive,
> Unless restrained by Thee ;
> I *could* (Good God !) I could believe
> The horrible decree.
> I *could* believe that God is hate,—
> The God of truth and grace
> . . . . . .
> Farther than that I cannot go
> Till Tophet takes me in.[2]

After all it was not these scathing satires but the hymns of Charles, which declared the free grace of God and offered it to all men, that did most to destroy Calvinism in England, and to deliver religion from the nightmare of ' the horrible decrees.'

Think of the effect, for instance, of the following hymn :

> Father, whose *everlasting love*
> Thy only Son for *sinners* gave,
> Whose grace to all did freely move,
> And sent Him down the *world* to save :
> Help us Thy mercy to extol,
> *Immense, unfathomed, unconfined ;*
> To praise the Lamb who died *for all*,
> The *general* Saviour of mankind.

[1] *Poetical Works*, Vol. III. p. 36. [2] Ibid., p. 60.

Many of the hymns of the period are characterized by the same teaching. His special and pointed references to *each* and *all* sometimes hardly fit their context, but it must be remembered that God's ' amazing love for all men ' had to be proclaimed and preached in season and out. It is the one central truth that matters supremely against the diabolical doctrine that God had damned the innocent from all eternity.

So he says, reiterating the universality of his message of love :

O for a trumpet voice,
On *all the world* to call !
To bid their hearts rejoice
In Him who died for *all* ;
For *all* my Lord was crucified,
For *all*, for all my Saviour died.

And, whenever he thinks of the Cross, and its benefits, it quickens him to the proclamation of his gospel, so that the great hymn of the crucified :

Would Jesus have the sinner die ?

concludes with the same proclamation of free grace and defiance of the horrible decrees.

O let Thy love my heart constrain !
Thy love for *every* sinner free,
That every fallen soul of man
May taste the grace that found out me ;
That *all* mankind with me may prove
Thy sovereign everlasting love.

The message of the universal love of God has become the universal message of the Church, and that this is so is chiefly due to the discovery made by John and Charles Wesley. Their passion for God's love explains the fervour of their preaching and hymns and also their boundless indignation against the doctrine that set limits on its scope. They knew

something of the length and breadth and of the height and depth of love,

> So wide, it never passed by one,
> Or it had passed by me.

Of all Wesley's doctrines, the Witness of the Spirit is most clearly drawn from his own experience. Wesley's words about justification and assurance and full assurance really confused some of his critics One of them—the Rev. Mr. Church—puts it thus : ' Once you held a degree of justifying faith, short of the full assurance of faith, the abiding witness of the Spirit, or the clear perception that Christ abideth in him, and yet you afterwards warned all not to think they were justified before they had a clear assurance that God had forgiven their sins. What difference there is between this *clear* assurance and that full assurance I know not.'

Wesley replied, ' Sir, I will tell you. The one is an assurance that my sins are forgiven, clear at first, but soon clouded with doubt or fear. The other is such a plerophory or full assurance that I am forgiven, and so clear a perception that Christ abideth in me, as utterly excludes all doubt and fear.'[1]

That, of course, simply puts into doctrinal form the actual experience of Wesley quoted above in reference to his conversion.[2]

By the witness of the Spirit, Wesley meant ' The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses with my Spirit that I am a child of God ; that Jesus hath loved me and given Himself for me ; and that all my sins are blotted out and I, even I, am reconciled to God.'[3]

Now this is not exactly what the Reformers meant by *Testimonium spiritus sancti.* ' In describing the authoritative character of Scripture, the Reformers always insisted that its recognition was awakened in believers by that

[1] *W. W.* VIII. 84. [2] See Chapter VI. [3] *W. W.* V. 107.

operation which they called the witness of the Holy Spirit. Just as God Himself makes us know and feel the sense of pardon in an inward experience by a faith which is His own work, so they believed that, by an operation of the same Spirit, believers were enabled to recognize that God Himself is speaking to us authoritatively in and through the words of Scripture.'[1]

John Wesley does not argue that an inward witness assures the truth of Scripture ; all that he argues is that assurance of sins forgiven is the work of the Holy Spirit within a man. It is the work of God's spirit confirming the human spirit. Wesley's doctrine is the Protestant doctrine of assurance as it came to him through experience, confirmed by the eighth chapter of Romans, but with the difference that it is attainable by all men. But, in addition to this, the doctrine finds confirmation in the witness of a man's own spirit, ' the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.'

But the confidence and joy of Charles Wesley's hymns gave the doctrine its life. A hundred instances could be given. One will suffice.

> My God is reconciled,
> His pardoning voice I hear,
> He owns me for His child,
> I can no longer fear,
> With confidence I now draw nigh,
> And Father, Abba, Father ! cry.

In some ways the most important doctrine of all was Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection, and important because its emphasis was that the perfection of Christians was perfection in love. It is not the negative side of deliverance from wrong-doing that matters so much as the positive obligation of right-doing. ' I want the witness, Lord, that all I do is right.' Wesley says the doctrine is contained in

[1] Lindsay : *History of the Reformation*, I. 461.

the words of the collect, ' That we may *perfectly love thee*, and worthily magnify Thy Holy Name.'

The doctrine was part of their personal discovery of God's universal love. For God's love shed abroad in our hearts is a love that overflows in our love for our neighbour. We love because He first loved us.' No perfection is possible by a mere series of denials, however drastic. Perfection is to be found in our affirmations and our actions, in the loving things we do and say. Perfect love, therefore, implies the social service which some individualistic perfectionism has ignored. It is love to God and love to our neighbour—and the love we feel to God is not sincere, or at least it is undeveloped, unless it finds its expression in love to others. The doctrine of perfect love has been the most fruitful spring of action for Methodists. Dr. R. W. Dale, the most honoured Free Church theologian of the nineteenth century, blamed the Methodists of his day on the ground that they had never worked out fully the implications of their doctrine. Wesley did not do so himself, although by means of his social service and his sense of social obligation he began to put it into practice. The teaching of Perfect Love as the highest possible Christian grace and characteristic, and of all it implies in the service of humanity, is a great Methodist heritage and obligation. And Dale was right in urging that Methodists had not developed it as they ought to have done. The attempt to realize an instantaneous perfection through an act of faith, though not an unfair deduction from certain of Wesley's teachings, has been isolated too much from the ethical and social content of his doctrine. It was precisely this failure to work out the deeper moral implications of the doctrine they had inherited, for which Dale criticized the Methodists of his day.

Wesley's doctrine was regarded in the eighteenth century as a startling innovation. He taught that people could enter into an experience of perfect love by faith, and that it would save them from all conscious sinning, although not from

error, and make them love their neighbours perfectly. He never professed it himself. Much of his writing on the subject is defence against misrepresentation, and his doctrine has certain logical inconsistencies. But the stress on perfect love is invaluable. Of the truth he taught we may say that he found it implied in his experience of God's love, but he, like Moses, possibly only had a vision of the promised land.

Of this doctrine, as of the others, Charles Wesley's hymns are the true Methodist expression. John Wesley, in his treatise on Christian Perfection, quoted many of them as illustrating their common views, but for our purpose one is sufficient :

Lord, I believe a rest remains
To all Thy people known,
A rest where pure enjoyment reigns,
And Thou art loved alone :

A rest where all our soul's desire
Is fixed on things above ;
Where fear and sin and grief expire,
Cast out by perfect love.

O that I now the rest might know,
Believe, and enter in !
Now, Saviour, now the power bestow,
And let me cease from sin.

Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
And seal me Thine abode !
Let all I am in Thee be lost ;
Let all be lost in God.

These, then, are the three principal doctrines of the discovery, but many other doctrines were fertilized by it. The doctrine of Justification by Faith had become a dogma, and Harnack[1] thinks that Luther, towards the end of his life, would have added it to the Athanasian Creed, and have pronounced the damnatory clauses over those who failed to believe in it.

[1] Harnack : *History of Dogma*, Vol. VII., p. 240 ff.

Wesley vivified it and made it live as the soul's method of approach to God, but he did not think that salvation came by believing in faith, but by trusting God.

Some of the doctrines which the Methodists taught, such as that of hell, were, in the nature of the case, not vitalized by experience. Wesley preached little on the subject. His one published sermon on hell is not even one of his 'Standard' doctrinal sermons. The dominant message of the Wesleys was love, not hell, though a second generation sometimes reversed the order—but second generations of great movements usually get the perspective wrong, and the founders of great movements are often blamed for the faults of their successors. Some early nineteenth-century Methodist preaching on hell was a caricature of Wesley's teaching.

One other thing remains to be said. What Charles did for the discovery by his hymns, John did by his organization. For if Charles had the genius of a poet, John had the genius of a statesman. In his organization John shows his real originality. He did not invent new methods. All the methods he used were suggested by other people. He did with other men's suggestions what Shakespeare did with other men's plots and with Holinshed's chronicles—he made them live. The power of genius is not always the power of invention; it is the power of breathing into the dust and making it man. Wesley took the material that lay to his hands and quickened it into life by his genius. The characteristic Methodist institutions were not man-made organizations.

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord.

Whether we call it natural genius or inspiration is immaterial; the fact remains that Wesley was the medium of the divine Spirit in organizing Methodism. He was the selective instrument of God in the building of the great

Methodist Church. To use Dr. Simon's phrase, he was 'the master-builder,'[1] but not the architect. All his work can be traced back to Aldersgate Street. By that I do not mean that Wesley had made no experiments before ; he had tried them in Georgia, bad ones and good ones ; the bad he dropped, the good to some extent he utilized, but the moulding energy was the God of his evangelical experience.

For no sooner were the Wesleys inflamed and irradiated with God's love than they wanted to tell everybody about it. The news was too good to be kept secret. They needed to communicate it to those who were seeking religion and to those, also, who were not. For the one there were the religious societies of the Church of England and the bands of the Moravian type, and for the others field preaching, though to Wesley such a work was a personal humiliation—'he made himself more vile' to do it. But the message must be proclaimed ; what else could be done ? And so the bands and societies became the medium of exploration and discovery, among all who entered into their fellowship. Wesley developed them characteristically, moulding the societies into a shape more effective for his purposes, and presently more or less substituting the class meeting for the bands. The class meetings rose out of the plan of a Bristol layman to meet a financial difficulty, but developed in Wesley's hands into meetings for fellowship, testimony, and experience, which became increasingly enriching and strengthening. The fellowship of the early Methodists was a fellowship in Christ ; they were joined together by His love to them and their love to Him, and they talked one to another of their common life and their common Lord. By means of their fellowship they entered into the true understanding of the essence of the Church.

The other organizations need not be described one by one ; they sprang into life as they were needed ; they were all instruments for spreading the message, or for conserving

[1] J. S. Simon : *Wesley, the Master-Builder*.

the corporate life of those who had received it. For instance, the lay preacher was needed for the dissemination of the message ; Conference was needed for conversations on the message ; and so with the others. The institutions of Methodism sprang from the great experience of the Wesleys —and John Wesley's work and purpose is expressed admirably by le Père Piette :

' He organized an ingenious system of ecclesiastical groups which had only one object—to embody the converts so as to maintain them at the altitude of religious fervour attained by their regeneration, and as much as possible to urge them on to the summit of perfection. Above all, he emphasized the importance of the simplest grouping—the class meeting—which in his eyes was the *cellule-mère* of the Methodist discipline.'[1]

Nothing is more striking about his organizations than the proof that history has given of their usefulness. Wesley's sure instinct for the right thing is perhaps the best evidence of his genius.

His organizations were to become the model for all sorts of social and political organizers in the near future, as Halévy's new history of England shows, but, most important of all, they were great roadways of evangelical traffic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and were as valuable as the Roman roads of the first century for spreading the good news of Jesus the Crucified. By means of them the Word of the Lord had free course and was glorified.

[1] Piette 645.

## Part III

# A RELIGION OF COMMON SENSE

'We talk common sense whether in verse or prose.'

—John Wesley.

## SYLLABUS

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# X

## THE RELIGION OF THE ORDINARY MAN

'We talk common sense whether in verse or prose' wrote John Wesley in his famous preface to the Hymn-Book—words he might have written as appropriately of any other publication or organization for which he was responsible. Poetry wedded to common sense is the ideal and practice of Wesley. Not only were prose and morality mediums of common sense, but so were poetry and religion. Poetry, he showed in the Hymn-Book, could talk common sense without losing her wings, and religion, he proved, could exist without extravagances and still be joyous. In other words, Wesley was a Pilgrim of Eternity in eighteenth-century garments, and left the stamp of his century upon his witness.

The eighteenth century was the age of Locke's 'pedestrian philosophy,' and reason and common sense were the watchwords of theology. Everything extraordinary, visionary, or supernatural was minimized and tested by common-sense standards, with a resultant narrowness of judgement and outlook. Now the common sense of Wesley had its limitations, but it had its advantages also. In some ways, no doubt, he reacted against his age, but its 'common-sense' standard of judgement both in thought and practice was the only one possible to him—and this has been to the great benefit of mankind. The eighteenth-century stamp of Methodism is at least partly responsible for its permanent value.

When the modern philosopher smiles at common-sense judgements, and says that people who say 'grass is green'

are giving a common-sense judgement, but are not telling the truth, his appeal is a very restricted one. And religion is, after all, not devised particularly for philosophers, who are rare, but for ordinary people, who are common. God made so many ordinary people, according to Abraham Lincoln, because they were the sort of people He liked best. Religion to be useful must be popular. Christianity is a religion for the common people. It must not be

> Too good
> For human nature's daily food.

John Wesley realized this as few men have done. 'I do not expect,' he said, 'the rich and great should want to speak with me, or to hear me ; for I speak the plain truth—a thing we hear little of, and do not desire to hear.'[1] Wesley spoke the plain truth for plain people in plain words. He disliked fine language and fine clothes. His message and his method were common sense. He spoke to the common people. In this he followed his Lord, whose heart was moved with compassion for the multitudes. Wesley did not think of religion as the special privilege of learning or wealth, or even of the 'once-born saint.' He never ceased to cry,

> Come all the world ; come, sinner, thou !
> All things in Christ are ready now.

But, with all this, he did not want religion to be swallowed up by common sense. It was genuine religious contact with the unseen, experience of God, access to the living fountains of spiritual life, to which he gave the witness of one who had sought and found, and could communicate what he had found to all sorts and conditions of men, a valid Christianity which would work, 'a power of God to Salvation.' It was his peculiar privilege and feat to open up a new world to the poor and disinherited, and to make *all* men see what was

[1] *W. J.* I. 197.

their fellowship in the mystery and their partnership in the unsearchable riches of Christ, of which he knew he was minister and steward.

He shared with the men of his day a detestation for the irrational ; he disliked extravagance and fanaticism as much as did Dr. Johnson or John Locke ; the sensuous sentimentality of certain types of religion his soul loathed, and the abstract speculations of others, however intellectual, he liked no better ; and he stamped his intense, if narrow, practicality on his religious system. Methodism is dated eighteenth century for good or ill. Wesley's message had limitations ; he himself had limitations. No doctrine that was not practical nor experimental seemed to him worth a moment's thought, and while the result of this temper has been the steady and increasing influence of his system on the ordinary mind, and on practical men in the two following centuries, it has perhaps entailed the loss of intellectuals. Methodism has produced artists, thinkers, and scholars, but has rarely kept them. And there is some truth in the criticism of the poverty of her intellectual output.

It may be said that Wesley did not so much hitch his wagon to the stars, as pack his stars into the wagons—but this he did—he made the ordinary life glow with divine glory for ordinary people. Through his ministry the poor heard the gospel preached. The prison gates of the ignorant were thrown open. He taught a mystical religion to practical men, so that they could find God in the ordinary life, and find a way of daily vision. Of visions they could say :

> Many a time they come,
> Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
> This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
> This air that smites his forehead is not air,
> But vision, yea, his very hand and foot—
> In moments when he feels he cannot die
> And knows himself no vision to himself,
> Nor the high God a Vision, nor that One
> Who rose again.

Miss Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler, daughter of the first Lord Wolverhampton, one of the few Wesleyan peers, understood Methodism when she wrote in her novel about a stained-glass window in East Lane Chapel 'which showed forth Jacob's dream':

'The patriarch lay asleep, with his hand on a little white tombstone at the foot of a solid oak staircase, which was covered with a red carpet neatly fastened down by brass rods; while up and down this staircase strolled fair-haired angels in long white nightgowns and purple wings.

'Not, of course, then, but in after years, Elizabeth learned to understand that this window was a type and an explanation of the power of early Methodism, the strength whereof lay in its marvellous capacity of adapting religion to the needs and uses of everyday life, and of bringing the infinite into the region of the homely and commonplace.'[1]

Wesley has often been called a practical mystic. He hated mysticism, in the technical sense of the term in which it will be considered below, but in the popular sense of it, as indicating a sixth-sense realization of the Unseen, Wesley was a mystic. But he was always a practical mystic; however truly his postal address might be, as it was, Heavenly Places in Christ Jesus, he never forgot it was also City Road, London. And it was in London, Bristol, Newcastle, that he found his work; he could not spare much time for angels and other inhabitants of the Heavenly Places; but of his real experiences in Heavenly Places he had no doubt at all, and so far he was a mystic.

On November 12, 1739, his *Journal* speaks of his meeting a young gentleman on the road who asked him if he had seen Whitefield's *Journals*, and he replied, '"Yes." "And what do you think of them?" said he. "Don't you think that they are d——d cant, enthusiasm from end to end? I think so." I asked him, "Why do you think so?" He replied: "Why, he talks so much about joy and stuff

[1] E. T. Fowler: *The Farringdons*, pp. 17–18.

and inward feelings. As I hope to be saved, I cannot tell what to make of it." I said, "Whatever is spoken of the religion of the heart, and of the inward workings of the Christ of God, must appear enthusiasm to those who have not felt them ; that is, if they take upon them to judge of the things which they own they know not ! " '

That is, of course, what a Methodist always would have said, and it is mysticism so far as it goes. It is the definite assertion of knowledge and experience which comes through other faculties than the senses. Wesley's evangelical message was based on his great discovery ; that fact was vital to all his work.

But Wesley disbelieved in inward experiences which could find no corroboration in Scripture, and in individual experience which could find no confirmation from other experiments. He emphasized the necessity of outward as well as inward religion against certain mystics of his time, and inward as well as outward religion against the current Anglican teaching. He believed in the necessity of individual experience in divine things, but disbelieved in individualism in religion, speaking strongly against 'solitariness,' and claiming that Christianity was a social religion. He believed in salvation by faith alone, but believed, against certain Moravians, in the necessity of means of grace and sacraments. His evangelical mysticism was deep and confident, the result of his own experience, confirmed by thousands of others, but he believed in Institutional Religion, and respected the Church because she was the depository of the common experience of the believing men of other centuries. In a day when such men as had experience of religion, or a glimmer of experience, tended to every sort of extravagance, leading them into 'enthusiasm' and immorality, Wesley's firm grip of the practical was of immense importance. He was a Christian and a Churchman, and did not believe in a Christianity that was not Institutional, because Christianity was, according to him, fundamentally a social religion. The

insistence on Institutional as well as Mystical Religion by John Wesley finds confirmation in Baron von Hügel's claim that both these principles are fundamental to Christianity.[1]

Now Wesley's common sense erected boundaries to his mystical experiences over which he would not pass. Speculations on questions like the Trinity seemed to him fruitless and dangerous.[2] Mystical utterances about God are an unpardonable waste of time[3]; the Calvinistic doctrine which denies the application of grace to everybody must not be discussed even if it could be proved by Scripture.[4] No experience, however rapturous, can excuse breaches of the moral law; there are certain walls to his eighteenth-century garden he will not even look over; plain morality, common sense, the fact of God's universal love, salvation by faith, and the means of grace are walls that restrict the area of his thought and action. But, much as he respected ecclesiastical law, he would not obey it if it hindered him doing good[5]; and, great as was his respect for sober reason, he would examine spiritual phenomena even if he was called an enthusiast.

The only tests of Christianity which Wesley regarded as of any value were ethical. Christianity to him was a life revealing itself in conduct. Christian experience was valuable as it made a man live well. No man agreed more emphatically with the prophet Micah than Wesley. 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Like Luther and Paul, Wesley discovered that such conduct was the fruit of experimental religion and not the cause of it, but conduct was the one thing that mattered for the soul, and salvation for Wesley was salvation from bad conduct into good conduct.

Perhaps this was never more clear than in his rules for members of his Society in 1743, which have remained

[1] Von Hügel: *The Mystical Element in Religion.*
[2] *W. W.* XII. 137 and 403.
[3] *W. W.* IX. 494.
[4] *W. W.* VII. 356.
[5] *W. J.* II. 237 *n.*

substantially the rules of English Methodism ever since. There are only three rules, which may be briefly stated as follows :

(1) Do no harm.
(2) Do good.
(3) Attend the ordinances of God.

A variety of illustrations of these rules are given ; these illustrations varied slightly in Wesley's lifetime, and would be differently chosen if selected for our own day,[1] but the rules still stand as our rules, whatever variety there be in examples. What underlies these rules is a desire to flee from the wrath to come and to be saved from their sins. To be a member of Wesley's Societies a consciousness of salvation is unnecessary ; all that is wanted is a desire for salvation, but the desire must be expressed by high personal conduct and in following the ordinances of God. Wesley also demands from his members churchmanship—that is, social religion ; for Christianity is not merely individual, but social.

There is nothing so amazing in this document as its omissions—not one word is said about evangelical experience as a necessary qualification for membership in the Society ; it is assumed that it will be absent with some ; the form of godliness was all that was essential, along with the resolution to seek the power. It was a Society not for the converted only, but for the seeker, so Wesley would even instance the Lord's Supper as one of the ordinances to be observed by all who seek ! But what is more amazing is that there was no intellectual or doctrinal test whatever. Any one could belong to a Methodist Society, whatever his theological convictions, so long as he proved himself a sincere seeker after God by doing good, abstaining from harm, and acknowledging the social character of religion by using the means of grace. While these practices, of course, implied

[1] J. S. Simon : *Methodist Societies.*

certain beliefs, it was the practice that was demanded, not the creed. The Methodist tests were, and are, ethical, and social. There are no others, or nearly none. This is brought out best in Wesley's tract, *The Character of a Methodist.*

'The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. Whoever imagines a Methodist is a man of such or such an opinion is grossly ignorant of the whole affair; he mistakes the truth totally.

'We believe, indeed, that "all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God"; and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and Infidels.

'We believe the written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish Church.

'We believe Christ to be the eternal, supreme God; and herein we are distinguished from the Socinians and Arians. But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think.

'A Methodist is not distinguished by laying the whole stress of religion on any single part of it. If you say—"Yes, he is; for he thinks 'we are saved by faith alone'": I answer, You do not understand the terms. By salvation he means holiness of heart and life. Is this placing a part of religion for the whole?

'If one asks me—Who is a Methodist according to your own account? I answer—A Methodist is one who has, "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given" unto him, one who "loves the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. . . ."

'And while he exercises his love to God by praying without ceasing, rejoicing evermore, and in everything giving thanks, this commandment is written in his heart, "That he who loveth God, love his brother also."'[1]

[1] *W. W.* VIII. 340–3.

To Wesley the salvation received by faith was a matter of conduct, of holiness, for what faith receives, as Wesley knew by his own discovery, is God's love, which creates love to God and to one's neighbour. The whole religious life is, therefore, Christian conduct towards God and towards my neighbour in company with my brother. This simple religion has always appealed to men of common sense, as it did to the judge of the York Circuit in 1771, when John Nelson was subpoena'd to assign his reason for having dismissed a woman (who was charged there with a capital crime) from the Methodist Society twelve months before. He read the 'rules' in court, and at the end of that one which forbids taking up goods without a probability of paying for them, he stopped and said, 'My lord, this was my reason for dismissing this woman from the Society to which I belong.' The judge arose and said, 'Good morality, Mr. Nelson.' Resuming his seat, he desired that the rest of the 'rules' should be read to him. After hearing them, he said emphatically to the court, 'Gentlemen, this is true Christianity.'

That official judgement on Wesley's religion of common sense remains the common judgement of the English-speaking world.

Wesley had to fight throughout his lifetime on behalf of his common-sense religion. He contended with bishops to prove that Methodists were not 'enthusiasts'; and mystics, Antinomians, Moravians, and Calvinists he opposed strenuously because he thought they were 'enthusiasts.' John Wesley was in nothing more Christian than in his controversies. Abused by scurrilous tongues, he was never scurrilous. He was very rarely even sarcastic as Charles sometimes was. He corrected or criticized opinions, not men Of course, he said plainly what he thought, but he learnt to do that at the Epworth Rectory, where differences of opinion were never deemed inconsistent with family affection. Wesley, in all his discussions, whether victorious or worsted

in argument, compares more than favourably with all his opponents, even with Law, whose reply to Wesley's early letters, though brilliant in its rebuke—to some extent deserved by Wesley—was unnecessarily cruel.

There is no better way of understanding the sturdy common sense and practical religion of Wesley than by placing it in contrast with the extravagances and speculations he controverted. If at times one feels he touches speculative subjects which are out of his range it cannot be denied that he bequeathed to the English-speaking world a religion of common sense for ordinary people.

# XI

## METHODISM AND MYSTICISM

'I think the rock on which I had nearest made shipwreck of the faith was the writings of the mystics; under which term I comprehend all, and only those who slight any means of grace.'

—JOHN WESLEY.

THE fundamental mystic conception of finding God in oneself struck Wesley as dangerous—there was so much else one could find in oneself—and many mystics confused the other things they found there with the Word who doubtless is in us all—the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Law for a time probably influenced Wesley towards mysticism. Mystic tendencies which, under the influence of Behmen, afterwards dominated his mind were present in Law even when he was a 'sort of oracle' to Wesley. In those early days Law once warned Wesley of confusing Christianity and philosophy, and twenty years afterwards, when Wesley criticized, not without reason, some of Law's later mystical works, he reminded the great non-juror of his own words.

'At a time when I was in great danger of not valuing the authority of Scripture enough, you made that important observation. "I see where your mistake lies. You would have a philosophical religion; but there can be no such thing. Religion is the most plain, simple thing in the world. It is only 'We love Him, because He first loved us.' So far as you add philosophy to religion, just so far you spoil it." This remark I have never forgotten since; and I trust in God I never shall. But have not you?'[1]

Wesley did not score many points in his controversies

[1] *W. W.* IX. 445.

with Law, but that is a palpable hit. No one who can wade through Law's later mystical works, whatever their excellences, could say that the religion they taught was a plain, simple thing.

But why did Wesley hate mysticism? We have already called him a practical mystic, and used the term 'mystic' with approval. Mysticism, after much abuse in past centuries, has been made respectable in our own age by the works of Von Hügel, Dean Inge, Evelyn Underhill, Rufus Jones, and William James, and the term has been specifically applied to the higher mystics and to a spiritual method of purification and union with God practised by some of the world's great souls. But, even so, would Wesley join with the modern chorus of voices in praise of mysticism? It is very doubtful. He would admit so much kinship with the mystics as a common belief with them in spiritual faculties in addition to the senses, for acquisition of spiritual truth, but he has little else in common with them, and he would rightly point out that the term mysticism cannot be applied exclusively to a few great men like Eckhart and Tauler, St. John of the Cross and Malebranche; it must also be applied to some very objectionable sects of Antinomians and individualistic degenerates. Wesley had bitter experience of what unbalanced mystical introspection brought about, and knew how easily mysticism became unbalanced, and what harm it did, without external checks, especially to the ordinary man. When Wesley used the word mysticism, he gave it a wider application than many modern writers do. His use of the word embraced not only select souls, but many of the mystics who did no credit to the title.

Wesley undoubtedly criticized the mysticism even of the great mystics. Mysticism often expressed itself in luscious and amorous metaphors, which his clean soul disliked; it entered into wild speculations which he could not follow, and which seemed to him contrary to plain reason; it ignored quite frequently the simple laws of

morality and social religious life through its absorption with higher matters, and plunged into individualistic vagaries which paid little respect either to the Church or to the Scripture.

Miss Evelyn Underhill's summary of the steps of the mystical ladder of ascent is probably the best. There are five steps :

1. Awakening.
2. Purgation by discipline.
3. Illumination or vision.
4. Mystic death or mortification.
5. Union or absorption in the Infinite.[1]

The last two stages are generally reached only by the great mystics, but the first three are normal steps in the spiritual life, obviously climbed by John Wesley, and in some measure by all men with definite Christian experiences.

But he stops short of the great mystic venture. As Dimond puts it : ' Wesley characteristically stopped short of the mystic ecstasy, and neither mystic death nor union can be said to describe any experience in Wesley's life.'[2]

This is true, but it does not follow that Wesley was wrong in not following the mystic way further than he did.

For it is just at that point that the problem is important. Wesley sought union with God as truly as any man who ever lived, but his conception of union was not the mystics'. He did not think of union as the fusion of divine and human personalities. Union, according to Wesley, was a man's humble fellowship with God ; it was the relation of person with person ; there was nothing of the materialist's blending and fusion so typical of much mystical writing, nor of the relation of the soul to God under erotic figures, which shocked—and rightly shocked—Wesley in the writings of Jacob Behmen. Wesley would have approved of Dr. Oman's work, *Grace and Personality*. The moral personality of man must be preserved even in his union with God.

[1] Evelyn Underhill : *The Mystic Way*, p 54. [2] Dimond, p. 77.

Canon Overton says that the one way in which the mystics hoped to achieve union with God was by faith and love. Wesley, of course, would have agreed with them in that, although he would have put it differently. For love and faith are more or less interchangeable terms in mystical literature, but in Wesley's teaching they are distinguished. But the faith or love that made the soul fit for union with God could only be won, according to the mystics, by the most drastic asceticisms. Law writes: 'The immediate essential necessary means of uniting men to God are prayer, mortification, and self-denial.' 'No,' says Wesley, 'the immediate essential necessary means of re-uniting one to God is living faith and that alone.'[1] Law means that the living love or faith which unites the soul to God must be purchased by mortification. Wesley thinks better of the possibilities of faith. He believes more firmly in what God *can do* for the man who simply and whole-heartedly trusts Him. Wesley's conception of divine love and the mystics' were very different, and the difference is really determinative of the distinction between Evangelicalism and Mysticism. The mystics' mind was too much influenced by sexual love as an analogy of divine-human relationship. Wesley thought of love as social, and it was at this point that he parted company with William Law.

The preface to his Hymn-Book of 1739, as Dr. J. S. Simon has pointed out, is of exceptional significance: 'Admitting that some of the verses in the collection were written upon the scheme of the mystic divines, Wesley explains his position in reference to men whom he and his brother once held in great veneration as the best explainers of the gospel of Christ. He shows wherein he had come to differ from them, and why he considered they did not teach the doctrines of Christ. He declared that neither an inward nor outward righteousness is the ground of our justification, and that the sole cause of our acceptance with God is the righteousness

[1] *W. W.* XII. 201.

and death of Christ, who fulfilled God's law and died in our stead.'[1]

Wesley puts his feeling about solitary religion in this preface most emphatically, and, having regard to its date and occasion, this is one of his most illuminating utterances.

'The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness; faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. This commandment have we from Christ that he who loves God love his brother also; and that we manifest our love by doing good unto all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith.'[2]

Wesley would not follow the 'Unitive Way' by the method of contemplative love and the devotions of silent ecstasy. He believed that that way madness lay—*as for most people it does*. The love he believed in was the love of St. John's Epistles and 1 Corinthians xiii.—plain and practical. And it could only be learned and practised in human fellowship and society.

Wesley has never been given sufficient credit for his profound psychology, nor his true instinct for Christianity, in this refusal of the mystic way to unity and his deliberate adoption of the social way. The way of the New Testament is the social way. 'Inasmuch as ye did it to one of these ye did it to Me.' 'He who says he loves God and hates his brother is a liar.' The moral precepts of Jesus, Paul, and John are social. The mystic way of absorption may be Platonic and Neo-Platonic, and, according to the mystics, religious; it may be adumbrated slightly by such Pauline expressions as 'in Christ,' though very slightly: but John Wesley's way of social fellowship and social charity finds infinitely better support in the New Testament than does the 'Unitive Way' of mysticism. Wesley thought the mystic way definitely unchristian, and he would not tread it. He

[1] J. S. Simon: *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, p. 246.
[2] *Poetical Works* I. xix.–xxiii., Preface.

may be accused of narrowness, but his practical sagacity did not lead him far astray. Whatever be true of the mystic way, it is the way of the few. It is quite true that the lives of Eckhart and Tauler and Catherine of Genoa show that the greatest mystics were great social servants too, but such persons are outshining exceptions. Wesley's social way of love is a way of unity with God of which the ordinary man is capable, and Wesley's religion is for ordinary people.

The real competitor with mysticism is Institutional Religion. The lesson Wesley learnt as a young man—that he could not go to heaven without companions—was one of the deepest realities of his life. Now mysticism could not flourish in a social community ; but love could flourish there, real love. The love that bears burdens and feels its brother's need and does real service to real people is the love that builds up.

> Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
> With boundless charity divine !

sang Wesley, and that charity was a love for the brother for whom Christ died. The love that acts and suffers and gives, Wesley rightly thought to be as genuine as the love that broods and adores. All love is one love. If love unites to God, what of the love given to His children ? The practical love which serves humanity ' builds up ' as truly as any other love, and, if the love is simpler, more truly.

But just as Wesley's social religion caused cleavage between the mystics and evangelicals as to which love-route they would follow, Wesley's practical religion found no use for mystical speculation.

Jacob Behmen, whom Law regarded as a master, most of all raised Wesley's ire. He acknowledged he was a good man, but not more admirable as a saint than many simple Methodists of his acquaintance.[1] Behmen's opinion seemed grotesque to Wesley. It is only fair to say that William Law

[1] *W. J.* I. 353 ; *W. W.* IX. 490–1.

is not the only great man who found precious ore in Behmen. He was admired in different ways by Schelling, Hagenbach, Hegel, and Ewald, and even Sir Isaac Newton was interested in him; but most people would have much sympathy with Wesley's criticisms. Wesley called his exposition of Genesis 'sublime nonsense; inimitable bombast; fustian not to be paralleled'—and years afterwards, when William Law, by taking much pains, had licked it into some sort of shape, he disparaged it; he disliked Behmenism 'because it goes beyond Scripture and reason, and, above all, because it struck at the root of external religion by destroying zeal for good works and particularly tends to make all men of sense bury their talent in the earth, the natural effect of continually declaiming in a loose and indiscriminate manner against reason and learning.'[1]

The visions of Jacob Behmen are very incoherent, and some of his work ridiculous—as, for instance, an exposition of the Lord's Prayer syllable by syllable—and some of his language, according to Overton, was quite indecent. Most people who were compelled to read Behmen would agree, if not with Wesley, with Dr. Johnson, who, when told that Law had alleged Behmen to have been in somewhat the same state with St. Paul and to have seen unutterable things, replied in his own racy manner, 'Were it even so, Jacob would have resembled St. Paul more by not attempting to utter them.'

William Law was a great man; in power of subtle literary expression incomparably superior to John Wesley, but even his admirers felt his study of Behmen launched him into troubled waters. Wesley's instinct about Law was pretty true. He admired and respected Law, but was right in reminding his brilliant contemporary that religion was a plain thing, and was splendidly right in not allowing himself to be carried away into fruitless speculations.

He had a greater work to do. His own clear experience

[1] Overton: *William Law*, p. 185. See note.

and his plain teaching of the plain Scriptures, his realization that genuine love must exercise itself in human relationships in order to be acceptable to the divine Father, kept him to simplicity. Wesley believed that Christian perfection—which is nothing more nor less than the true meaning of the unity with God for which the mystics craved—was perfect love, and he saw that love, to be perfect, must be practised ; therefore he chose not to walk on the mystic way, but on the social way, to union with God. In nothing was his common sense more sublime than in his assertion of social love and his rejection of mysticism.

Nothing brings out the differences between Methodism and Mysticism more clearly than a comparison of the two hymns of St. John of the Cross and Charles Wesley on the Dark Night of the Soul. Charles Wesley's ' Wrestling Jacob ' is the best literary expression of the Evangelical experience, and Mysticism rises to no greater heights than in the writings of St. John of the Cross.

' Wrestling Jacob ' shows Charles Wesley at his best and deepest. It transmutes one of the great stories of the Old Testament into a Methodist epic. Well might Dr. Watts say —and it was saying a great deal—that that single hymn was worth all he ever wrote. The hymn emphasizes not only the discovery of God's love, but suggests its width and scope.

The story of Jacob at Peniel, however much a narrative, has the value of the Greek myth and more. It is capable of many applications. Charles Wesley gives it an evangelical application. Here is a man face to face with Fate. He cannot escape or evade the danger of meeting his wronged brother to-morrow. He has cunningly outwitted all his other competitors, but at last he is up against Fate. Fate could only be conceived as a person in antiquity—to Jacob it was God. The ' Fear of Isaac ' was the name of God, in which he had been educated. There was a destiny in life, he had learnt, that the cleverest man could not evade. During

a sleepless night he pondered on what this Fate—Fear—God was. This invisible one was dogging his steps and was inevadable! He became so real that Jacob wrestled with Him. He struggled with Him to discover whether He was really as terrible as he had believed, and, though wounded in the struggle, became confident of God's merciful heart. And the sun that rose on Peniel when the night vanished created a new day in which Jacob knew that God was his friend.

Wrestling Jacob is to be found again in Romans vii. His name there is Saul of Tarsus. He had been a successful man and is a proud one, but in his striving to do right he had been repeatedly defeated. The law of God, good and holy, terrified him, and the God behind that law was an awful God, the Judge of all the Earth.

Paul felt himself to be a wretched man tied to a body of death, from which he cried for deliverance, and in his soul's night struggle he made the discovery that the God revealed by the law as a condemning judge was, in point of fact, his own Father. It came home to him in the face of God's Son, Jesus, and he went about the world thereafter liberated from fear and bondage, crying, 'No condemnation' and 'Abba, Father.'

There is a blending of the struggles and triumph of Jacob and Paul in Wesley's hymn, interpreted by the experience of John and Charles Wesley. The hymn records the struggle for the righteousness they had been unable to achieve; they had realized that with all their good works they were but sinful men; neither their culture nor their discipline could save them; what they were 'their misery and sin declared'; but when they came into real contact with the God, whose wrath they dreaded, they discovered in the experience of their glowing hearts that He was Love, and they gained the courage of a new faith. The evangelical struggle and victory of the Wesleys and their converts was the inspiration of the great hymn which is the

evangelical interpretation and application of the narrative of Jacob's wrestling at Peniel.

For the soul—Charles Wesley's soul—in its dark night was in solitude, and pondering on an unknown God with whom he had some touch, but of whom he had no vision, he cries :

> Come, O thou traveller unknown,
> Whom still I hold but cannot see !

But in the darkness and loneliness he *will know*, if a man can. ' Show me Thy glory,' he seems to cry, ' but if Thou wilt not, I, the violent, will take the Kingdom by force.'

> My company before is gone,
> And I am left alone with Thee ;
> With Thee all night I mean to stay,
> And wrestle till the break of day.

But the Unknown is silent, except to ask his name. So the penitent soul replies :

> I need not tell Thee who I am,
> My misery and sin declare ;
> Thyself hast called me by my name ;
> Look on Thy hands, and read it there :
> But who, I ask Thee, who art Thou ?
> Tell me Thy name, and tell me now.

Yes, tell me Thy name—Thy name, Thy nature, for they are one ! Art Thou only my inexorable judge ? Is there nothing for me but Thy voice in my conscience speaking condemnation ? How one hears the piteous anguish of soul of many of the heart-broken penitents of the Great Revival made vocal by the poet's words ! How one sees the determination to find God on the part of helpless sinners desperate in their need !

Will Thou not yet to me reveal
Thy new, unutterable name?
Tell me, I still beseech Thee, tell;
To know it now, resolved I am;
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.

Then the weakness and despair of the soul struggling for peace, through all those sad days of searching when Charles was ill and restless, and seeking for God and finding Him not, of which his *Journal* speaks, causes him to cry out,

I rise superior to my pain;
When I am weak, then I am strong;

and he goes on with the struggle.

Verse by verse the hymn deepens in intensity, until at the sixth and seventh it reaches its climax.

Yield to me now; for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair.

He has reached absolute helplessness—the deep necessity which is God's opportunity.

Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,
Be conquered by my instant prayer;
Speak, or Thou never hence shalt move,
And tell me if Thy name is Love.

That line should be read slowly, with a pause after every word:

And—tell—me—if—Thy—name—IS—Love.

Then the triumphant answer and the real climax of the hymn:

'Tis Love! 'Tis Love! Thou diedst for me!
I hear Thy whisper in my heart.

Then the full revelation of the Methodist gospel, which is to set thousands and thousands of tongues singing for centuries to come :

> The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
> Pure, universal Love Thou art ;
> To me, to all, Thy mercies move ;
> Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

That is the climax of the experience, but it is not all ; the experience is *life-giving*.

> I see Thee face to face, and live.

The experience is *enduring*.

> I know Thee, Saviour, who Thou art,
> Jesus, the feeble sinner's Friend ;
> Nor wilt Thou with the night depart,
> But stay and love me to the end.

The experience is *strengthening*.

> Withered my nature's strength, from Thee
> My soul its life and succour brings.

The experience is one of strenuous conflict and victory, but, before the last triumphant verse is quoted, let us turn to the great Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross. His book called *The Dark Night of the Soul*, is a work of the deepest spirituality and says all the best that mysticism had to say. It is really an exposition of a hymn of his own composition. The hymn describes a dark night in which the soul, stripping herself of everything, goes to meet her Lord, and enters into deep communion with Him. The great hymn of Mysticism may well be compared with the great hymn of Methodism, for both describe dark night experiences of the human soul.

Here are extracts from it in Mrs. Cunningham Graham's translation[1] :

[1] *The Dark Night of the Soul* (Methuen), 1905, p. 29.

Into the darkness of the night,
With heartache kindled into love,
  Oh, blessed chance!
I steal me forth unseen,
My house being wrapped in sleep.

Into the happy night,
In secret, seen of none,
  Nor saw I aught
Without, or other light or guide,
Save that which in my heart did burn.

Oh, night, that led me, guiding night,
Oh, night far sweeter than the dawn;
Oh, night, that did so then unite
The Loved with his Beloved,
Transforming Lover in Beloved.

On my blossoming breast,
Alone for him entire was kept,
  He fell asleep,
Whilst I caressed
And fanned him with the cedar fan.

The breeze from forth the battlements
As then it tossed his hair about,
  With his fair hand
He touched me lightly on the neck,
And reft me of my senses in a swoon.

I lay quite still, all memory lost,
I leaned my face upon my Loved one's breast;
I knew no more, in sweet abandonment
  I cast away my care,
And left it all forgot amidst the lilies fair.

What a difference! The mystic's song no doubt is sweet, and the mystic's book which interprets the song is strong, and demands from the soul the completest sacrifice and purity, but the mystic's hymn leaves the soul 'lying quite still in sweet abandonment.'

The Methodist's song is sweet and strong; the love that

comes is just as overpowering, but it does not bid us lie still and sleep. Rather, Charles Wesley cries :

> Lame as I am, I take the prey,
> Hell, earth, and sin with ease o'ercome ;
> I leap for joy, pursue my way,
> And as a bounding hart fly home,
> Through all eternity to prove
> Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

Wesley's experience of the lower type of mystic had been wide and illuminating. The doctrine of ' stillness ' did serious harm in the early Methodist Societies. The doctrine itself was an abstract, logical deduction from that of justification by faith *only*, interpreted by the words of the psalm, ' Be still and know that I am God.' But Wesley was much too practical to accept, without any reference to the general body of truth and practice of Christian men, an abstract deduction from a single doctrine.

If we are saved by faith only, argued Molther and his like, we must not depend on means of grace, we must not depend on good works. The soul that practises such things will be tempted to rely on them, and normally will trust them as means of salvation, but we are justified by faith *only*. We must give nothing but faith. We must do nothing. ' Doing is a deadly thing.' We must only believe ; we must be still even from good works, and wait for the Lord to work. It must be admitted that this doctrine was not an illogical deduction from Luther's doctrine, for Luther's addition of the word *only* to Paul's doctrine of salvation by faith did not improve the doctrine. Luther perhaps was justified in incorporating the explanatory word ' only ' into his translation of Scripture in order to make his contemporaries understand the true significance of Paul's doctrine. But when his followers made ' faith only ' into a logical formula, exclusive of all human goodness, it could easily become a mischievous one, as it often actually did. The weakness of

the proposition, of course, is the narrowing of the meaning of faith, for, if faith works indirectly as well as directly, it is not necessarily less ' faith only.' But faith itself may sometimes need nourishment.

Now Wesley realized clearly that any one who ignored the means of grace contradicted the collective experience of the Church. He stated emphatically that Christianity was a social religion ; common worship was an expression of its social life, while stillness and solitariness were ultimately a denial of it, and he took the same stand against Molther as against all mystics. No one believed more intensely in the necessity of personal faith for the individual, but it could never be a faith that denied or ignored the social character of Christianity. This is the essence of practical Christianity, and no one saw with greater clearness the essential need of the balance between mysticism and institutionalism, individualism and collectivism, liberty and government, than Wesley. Nor has a better synthesis of these antithetical beliefs ever existed than in Methodism.

It may be worth while to record his dealings with Molther and Zinzendorf as an indication of the way in which he escaped the perils of his own personal spiritual experience—and was prevented from following wandering fires. The Society at Fetter Lane was a Society of the Church of England ; John Wesley was its president ; but his friends, the Huttons, were under Moravian influence. A German, Philip Molther, taught his special doctrine of stillness, and Charles Wesley emphasized the necessity of the ordinances, particularly, no doubt, the Lord's Supper. Molther seems to have objected even to Bible reading until ' faith only ' had accomplished its work. This caused controversy which ultimately meant that the Society split, part of it going to the Foundery and forming the first Methodist Society.

The views of the Wesleys are expressed in two poems, one published under the title of ' The Means of Grace ' in 1739, and one on ' The Bloody Issue Cured ' in 1749. In both of

them, the Word of God and the Sacrament are the means of grace sung about. They both affirm the danger of making idols of the means of grace, but assert that, used by a believing man, God comes to the soul through them. He can be found in and through the sacred Word and in and through the sacred rite. The garment touched by the woman with an issue of blood is used by Charles Wesley as an illustration of the sacrament, and his verses express what both hymns teach, both about the Word and the sacrament.

His body doth the cure dispense,
His garment is the ordinance
  In which He deigns to appear;
The Word, the prayer, the broken bread,
Virtue from Him doth best proceed,
  And I shall find Him here.

I followed with the thoughtless throng,
And pressed and crowded Him too long,
  And weighed Him down with sin;
But *Him* I did not hope to *touch*,
I never used the means *as such*.
  Or looked to be made clean.

The Spirit of an healthful mind
I waited not in them to find,
  The Bread that comes from heaven;
Beyond my form I did not go,
The power of godliness to know,
  And feel my sins forgiven.

But now I seek to touch my Lord,
To hear His whisper in the Word,
  To feel His Spirit blow;
To watch the love of which I read,
To taste Him in the mystic bread,
  And all His sweetness know.[1]

Of this teaching and protest the first organized Methodist Society was the definite result. Wesley correlated his spiritual

[1] *Poetical Works* IV. 452.

experience ; he did not forget what he had received through the sacrament, as well as by faith, at Aldersgate Street ; he was profoundly impressed by his mother's experience of assurance, who said, 'Two or three weeks ago, when my son Hall was pronouncing those words, in delivering the cup to me, "The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was shed for thee," the word struck through my heart, and I knew that God for Christ's sake had forgiven *me* all *my sins*.' He found that the principal result of Molther's teaching was that happy people became miserable, and that the ordinances of the Church were treated as valueless. He realized that receiving Christ in the sacrament was not inconsistent with receiving Him by faith, because, whether by means of ordinances or without them, there was no other way than faith of receiving Him. But he found that nothing inspired faith more surely than the great ordinance which brought home with such blessed force the realities of Christ's incarnation and atonement, and he did not cease to be a sacramentalist when he became an evangelical ; he stood for evangelical sacramentalism and sacramental evangelism, and was successful in preventing that divorce of evangelical and sacramental religion which threatened the Society in its early days, and has often threatened it, with better success, since. The *Journal*, June 26, 1740, records his emphasis of the sacrament as a command of God and a perpetual means of grace, not merely as a confirming but also a converting ordinance.

He sums up Molther's views thus :

'As to the way of faith, you believe :

'That the way to attain is to wait for Christ, and be still —that is :

Not to use (what we term) the means of grace ;
Not to go to church ;
Not to communicate ;
Not to fast ;
Not to use much private prayer ;

Not to read the Scriptures (Because you believe these are not *means* of grace ; that is, do not ordinarily convey God's grace to unbelievers ; and that it is impossible for a man to use them without trusting in them) ;

Not to do temporal good ;

Not to attempt spiritual good.'

Wesley says, on the contrary, that his view is :

The way to it is to wait for Christ and be still.

In using all means of grace. (Because he believed these are ' *means* of grace ' ; that is, do ordinarily convey God's grace to unbelievers ; and that it is possible for a man to use them without trusting in them.)[1]

Wesley's sagacity is well illustrated by this summary of his letter to Molther ; reading between the lines, it is not difficult to see that the chief centre of controversy was the sacrament,[2] and that Charles Wesley was the protagonist during John's absence in Bristol.[3]

The sagacity of Wesley was not less manifest in his dealings with the Calvinistic decrees. His bitterest opponents were the Calvinistic Methodists, but his realization that there could be no morality without hope, and that for the great multitudes of the people Calvinism made hope logically impossible, is illustrative of his practical temper. The moral laxity of view, and in some cases in practice, amongst mystics and Antinomians was shocking to Wesley, and the instances of self-delusion to be found in the *Journals* and in the Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers[4] are almost incredible to the modern mind. Wesley's idea of

[1] *W. J.* II. 339–40. [2] *W. J.* II. 361.

[3] On November 7, 1730, there was a dispute about the Lord's Supper at Fetter Lane, and there was much discouragement among the members. On November 10 the first cheering word was heard when one woman of the Society spoke of her confidence in God since the hour ' He was made known to her in the breaking of the bread ' (the sacrament). Mr. Curnock thinks this woman was Wesley's mother. She probably was, but, in any case, Wesley based his view that the sacrament is ' an outward ordinance whereby faith that brings salvation comes to them who had it not,' on this testimony. This is very far from the ' stillness ' theory.

[4] See *Haime's Life.*

salvation was not so much escape from hell as escape from sin, and he was merciless to the type of religion which cared little whether sin was escaped or not, so that some way of cheating the Devil of his own were discovered. And against that loathsome theory, masquerading in his day under religious profession, Wesley made his protest effective. Mystical speculation, theological theorizing, fanciful individualism, were the dangers of the personal religious experience Wesley enjoyed and taught. He guarded his people against them by his perpetual insistence on the obligation of social duties, whether in social worship or social service.

'Orthodoxy or right opinion,' he writes, 'is at best but a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part at all.' And 'I will not quarrel with you about any opinion. Only see that your heart be right toward God, and that you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ; that you love your neighbour, and walk as your Master walked; and I desire no more. I am sick of opinions; I am weary to hear them. My soul loathes this frothy food. Give me solid and substantial religion; give me an humble, gentle love of God and man, a man full of mercy and good fruits.'

The practical common-sense conception of religion needed fighting for, in Wesley's day—and inward religion without outward was as dangerous to its cultivation as outward is without inward.

Wesley disliked all speculative and mystical thinking. Religion, according to him, was primarily life; and love to God and man, that is to say, inspired conduct, was of far more importance to him than creed. He certainly did not under-estimate the reason, but he was so reasonable as to realize that some of the doctrines of the Infinite were necessarily beyond reason. He may be open to the criticism that reason in his mind could hardly be distinguished from common sense, and that he regarded it as the organ 'with which one syllogizes.' His pathetic belief in his own

syllogisms is the strongest evidence to be found of his credulity. There are problems that can hardly be settled, for instance, as he settled that of the divine authority of the Scriptures to his own satisfaction. Here is what he calls a short, clear, strong argument :

> The Bible must be the invention of either good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God.
>
> 1. It could not be the invention of good men or angels, for they neither would nor could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing, saying ' Thus saith the Lord,' when it was their own invention.
>
> 2. It could not be the invention of bad men or devils, for they would not make a book which commands our duty, forbids all sin and condemns their souls to hell to all eternity.
>
> 3. Therefore I draw this conclusion that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration.[1]

His tendency to settle great problems with a syllogism and to put truth into a nutshell is at times a little tiresome, but it is the defect of his pragmatical and common-sense mind.

But the best of him is seen in his demand of a good life and the good life he lived; and no mystical claim, no emotional fervour, no intellectual gymnastics, could avert his mind from teaching and practising holiness.

[1] *W. W.* X. 414–15.

## XII

## A COMMON-SENSE CHURCH

Wesley's dealings with mystics of every kind clearly showed the strength and limitation of his religion. His common sense manifested itself not only in his views of personal religion, but in all his organizations. He placed practical service above every ecclesiastical consideration; he was bound by no ecclesiastical theories; he respected the Church and the bishops, but he permitted nothing, as he told the great Bishop Butler in the incident already quoted, to stand in his way of doing good.[1] This was very evident in the foundation of the American Methodist Church after the Revolution. Charles Wesley was so limited by his ecclesiastical tenets that he would have permitted America to remain unevangelized and largely deprived of the Sacraments rather than have sanctioned the ordination of several superintendents or bishops. John cared only for the practicable, and, because his instinct was sound, chose the right method for the spread of his message. History has proved that his practical instinct was almost invariably right.

Nothing is more conspicuous about Methodism than the common-sense nature of her organization. The character of Wesley was stamped on his eighteenth-century organizations, and their practicability has been proved by their long-existing usefulness. This is true in America as well as in England, but in America, notwithstanding the enduring impress of his genius on the constitution of the Church, Wesley naturally could not influence its development to the same degree as he influenced that of British Methodism.

[1] *W. J.* II. 237 *n.*

But while many of the excellences of American Methodism, no doubt, have been developed by the practical genius of the United States, the main lines of Wesley's constitution have been followed, and, notwithstanding necessary local adaptations, the practical statesmanship and clear-headed foresight of Wesley are illustrated by the colossal developments of American Methodism.

But it is in England that we see most clearly the impress of Wesley's organizing skill on the Methodist machinery. In creating and developing his Society, he was not restricted by ecclesiastical tradition. The very fact that his Society was not a Church, but assumed the Church as its background, liberated Wesley as an ecclesiastical organizer from the dead hand of the past. It was possible for his Society in the eighteenth century to grow up with the same liberty as the early Christian societies of the first. Wesley sometimes justified his organization by early Christian precedents—his love-feasts and watch-nights, for instance—but precedent had no control over his mind. He was possessed, like the early Christians, with a great experience, which had been communicated to thousands of people, and by a great message; and what mattered was the conservation of the corporate and individual Christian life of those who shared the experience, and who desired to disseminate the message. The consequence was that the Methodist Societies and organizations were a free growth. Everything was accepted or rejected according to its usefulness to the Methodist experience and message. The Societies developed in many ways in a manner analogous to those of the first century. In point of fact, the Society was so much a Church that, after Wesley's death, its existence apart from the Church, after some debate and division, was secured without fundamental alteration of its characteristics. It was all to the good that Methodism was not founded on the basis of theoretical Church principles, Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational. The selection of its organizations might be

called opportunist if the word were not so often used with a depreciatory significance. Wesley was not a conscious Church builder framing a Church on the basis of any ecclesiastical theories any more than was St. Paul. Wesley was all the time dealing with life, with living men and women newly illuminated, and he was finding organizations which would secure for them continuous corporate existence. He did not ask himself whether the Circuit System was to be found in the New Testament, or whether class-leaders were identical with New Testament 'helps' or 'prophets'; he experimented with this organization or that, in order to see whether it could become an instrument of a religious society in the eighteenth century, and showed amazing insight in adopting the right institution for his purpose.

He was led by the Spirit of God, who is the Holy Spirit of liberty, not limited by first-century or sixteenth-century precedents. It is quite likely that, if Wesley had been deliberately forming a Church system, he would have been entangled in controversies, like those of a previous century, as to what was the exact ecclesiastical polity of the New Testament. Wesley was delivered from the folly of making a period of sixty years in the first century of our era determinative of the Church polity of his own day, simply because he did not realize that he was an instrument in God's hand for the refounding of His Church, but thought that he was shaping a religious society which was to be a part of the Church. The polity of Wesleyan Methodism is not the polity of the New Testament, and the attempts of later years to find it there are purely artificial.

Methodist polity is an evidence that the activities of the Holy Spirit are as operative in modern as in ancient times for men who follow His guidance, as John Wesley did. The Methodist Conference has often sung in times of conflict and difficulty some great words of Charles Wesley, of which the history of Methodism is an unanswerable proof:

By Thine unerring Spirit led,
We shall not in the desert stray;
We shall not full direction need,
Nor miss our providential way;
As far from danger as from fear,
While love, almighty love, is near.

The common-sense mould of the Methodist organizations need not be illustrated by detailed examination of each one of them. They are very simple organizations. Anybody might have realized the necessity of Conference, Circuits, itinerating preachers, weekly gifts for financial support, bands and class meetings for mutual fellowship in holy things, but it is often the discovery of simple and obvious things that leads to success. Clever people often do not see the obvious. One particular fact is noteworthy. From the very beginning, Wesley set people to work—preachers, band-leaders, class-leaders, and very soon stewards and officers—and not only set them to work, but gave them responsibilities. This was essential for an effective religious system amongst ordinary people, and has been one of the causes of the amazing success of Methodism ever since. At the present day the number of officials in English Wesleyan Methodism, including Sunday-school teachers and every sort of worker, may be as great as 125,000, and is certainly not less than 100,000. The total membership is only 500,000; at least one out of every five members of the Methodist Church is a Methodist official. They are co-ordinated in a complex but effective organization. Nothing has counted more steadily for the success of Methodism than this widely diffused partnership in its work.

Wesley realized, too, the dangers of mere local control of people whose interest in the Church was chiefly financial. He probably saw how often Congregational Churches had succumbed to the tyranny of local magnates. His conference and discipline always guarded Methodism from local abuses.

Wesley was aware of conditions in Dissent such as those described by Halévy :

> The law obliged the congregations to put their places of worship into the hands of trustees. These trustees, chosen normally from the influential members of the congregation, became in quiet times rulers of the association of which they were the legal representatives. Thus the little religious democracy degenerated into a plutocracy. If difficulties arose between a pastor and a section of his flock, the pastor's safest policy would be an alliance with the trustees in opposition perhaps to the will of the majority. What could the malcontents do? In very many instances they yielded or receded. In the locality where the dispute had taken place, Dissent was discredited.[1]

Much power was for this reason kept in his own hands through his preachers. Ministerial authority, as the next century showed, was the danger-point of Methodism, but it was essential in its earlier stages, and has been modified since in ways which have established an admirable balance of government between ministers and laymen. No Church system, while liberating the minister for an independent response to his vocation, has given better opportunities to laymen for the service of God and their fellows. Methodism is a common-sense ecclesiastical system for common-sense people. Its adaptations have always been made in response to practical necessities, and have never been controlled by antiquated ecclesiastical precedents.

It would be easy to illustrate the common sense of Wesley to almost any extent ; no casual reader of his *Journal* could dip into it for half an hour's reading without meeting instances ; his judgements, whether literary, practical, political, or ecclesiastical, were common-sense judgements. But the point to be noted is that this common sense was only the mode of a religious life which was above common sense. He was a practical mystic. His method and mentality profoundly affected the development of Methodism and stamped it from the first with practicality—

[1] Halévy I. 358.

but it was fervent emotional religion which was so moulded. There were great possibilities of emotional extravagance in English Methodism, and there were occasional outbreaks of ignorant fanaticism, always promptly curbed by Wesley. The doctrines of Wesley were kindred to doctrines which lead very quickly to mental unsoundness. Nothing is clearer than the fact that distinction between vision and illusion is not easily definable. But it was Wesley's triumph that his people, who saw visions and dreamed dreams, and sang heady and intoxicating hymns, should have been so sober, and that his organization should have rapidly become one of the most steadying influences in English social life. John Gambold said of him, in his Oxford days, what has been true ever since both of Wesley and his people : ' He was blest with such activity as to be always gaining ground and such steadiness that he lost none.'

Methodism remains a common-sense religion. Both in England and in America we may claim that no Protestant Church is so good a business concern. Methodism takes a legitimate pride in bringing the practical business qualities of the Anglo-American races into the service of our religion, and no denomination made so much progress in the nineteenth century as Methodism. Methodism has spread out in every part of the world, because of the distinctiveness and the elasticity of her organization. She has opened up religion to the ordinary man, quickened him with spiritual power, and done a service to great masses of English-speaking people of immeasurable value, to say nothing of her work as a great missionary force in the pagan world.

The most successful appeal of Methodism has always been to business communities. Methodists have grown in wealth with startling rapidity. The Methodist captains of industry in the north of England in the early nineteenth century were very numerous. They were a chief factor in the industrial revival. Wesley realized that great wealth would be a result of his religious teaching, and regarded it as a

peril to Methodism. He spoke plainly enough to his own people : ' Allowing that diligence and frugality must produce riches, is there no means to hinder riches from destroying the religion of those who possess them ? I can only see one possible way ; *give* all you can.'[1]

July 11, 1764, of the *Journal* reads : ' I gave all our brethren a solemn warning not to love the world or the things of the world. This is one way whereby Satan will surely endeavour to overthrow the present work of God. Riches swiftly increase in many Methodists so-called. What but the mighty power of God can hinder their setting their hearts upon them ? And if so, the life of God vanishes away.'[2] Methodists have unquestionably been very liberal, but it is equally true that riches have ruined more of them than any other thing.

It is significant that the man whose capacity is for business success should be the man attracted by Methodism, and it confirms the claim that Methodism is the religion of common sense. In the complex industrial world of to-day the need of the gospel is painfully evident, and no Church has such an opportunity as the heirs of Wesley's common sense.

But perhaps modern Methodists should question themselves carefully as to which feature of eighteenth-century Methodism is most characteristic of them—its burning evangelical experience or its common sense. It is good business, certainly, but is it as good religion ? Wesley would have scrapped his machinery if it had done nothing but develop better machinery.

Wesley's work was to spread scriptural holiness throughout the length and breadth of the land. He organized carefully, but never exaggerated the value of his organization. The danger at the present time is that Wesley's heirs may forget that the most important part of their heritage is not the machinery of Methodism, but the spiritual inspiration which created it.

[1] *W. W.* VII. 277. [2] *W. W.* III. 177–8.

The equipment of Methodism is excellent, but more is required of Methodists than merely to preserve it. Material prosperity must not be made an end in itself. It sometimes seems as if the eighteenth-century stamp of Methodism may more than any other thing mar her spiritual usefulness: for if she can produce nothing except what money can buy and money can run, she is inevitably doomed to failure.

After all, the most important thing about John Wesley was not his common sense. Men of his temper of mind were common enough in the eighteenth century. What was remarkable was that such a common-sense person should be accused of 'enthusiasm.' It was the combination of spiritual experience with common sense which made him 'reckon all things but dung, so that he could win Christ.' He combined an immense fervour with a calm temper, a rational mind, and a judicial spirit. He enjoyed the exhilarating experience of fervent souls, but, more than any other man of like experience, he remained the master of his emotions. His common sense was as marked as his fervour. Nothing has been of greater value to his people than his demonstration that the most fiery religious experience can be enjoyed by a perfectly normal person. Dr. Caldecott, in his analysis of the psychology of the early Methodist preachers, finds them to be characterized with the same sobriety of mind and character. 'These young men,' he writes, 'although they describe unusually intense emotionality, were not of ill-balanced nervous systems.'[1] Methodism has always been a fervent religion for common-sense people.

John Wesley realized that the way to the deepest communion with God was the way of love, and that love must be practised in the social life; but he knew when his own heart was strangely warmed by his great discovery that love came from God through faith. Methodism is realizing to-day what good sense this is. She practises love in all sorts of

[1] *The Religious Sentiment*, an essay read before the Aristotelian Society by Dr. Alfred Caldecott, p. 1.

ameliorative works, in social campaigns, in practical undertakings for the destruction of the forces which debase men and women and children. Her direct impact on secular life is greater than it has ever been, but, with all her fidelity to the Wesleyan ideal of philanthropic and social service, let her not forget that the love she gives, whether for personal salvation or for social service, is not so important as the love she receives. The springs of Christian service dry up as the motive 'for Christ's sake' weakens. We shall not love humanity and serve humanity except as the love of Christ constrains us. Our common-sense service of men will weaken even in sense if it weaken in rapture.

The religion of John Wesley is a religion for the people. It is the religion of a man whose parish is the world. It is a religion that can be practised in the home, the market, and the street, but it is a religion which, if practised well, means an intensity of devotion as complete as that demanded of the mystics, but of a more intelligible and practical character. It is nothing less than loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves.

What ultimately justifies Methodism is not her common sense, but her great discovery. The fire kindled in Aldersgate Street created Methodism. Her machinery exists to spread the fire. She stands for a communicable experience of the love of God received into the heart by faith and proclaimed to all men. Methodism is not worth preserving except in so far as she preserves her vital experience of God and witnesses to it. Her glory has been that this experience could be enjoyed by ordinary people and practised in the normal life—but her common-sense methods of expression and organization, magnificent when used to spread forth the vital experience of the love of God, are an impertinence for any other object. It would be a tragedy if the great discovery were submerged in a flood of mere common sense; and if the pilgrim of eternity were forgotten and only the eighteenth-century man remembered.

# PART IV

# THE WESLEYAN INFLUENCE ON RELIGION

'See how great a flame aspires
Kindled by a spark of grace.'

—C. Wesley.

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## XIII

## MODERN METHODISM

It is not easy to weigh the effects of the Evangelical Revival, or of any similar great movement, with accuracy. Some results of the work of the Wesleys are clear and definite, as, for instance, the Methodist Churches with which in a brief summary this chapter will deal. They are conspicuous factors of the life of all English-speaking countries. Methodists are more numerous than any other Protestant body, and their missionary activities are apparent in every part of the world. But, according to a great English authority, 'Methodism was the least result of the Methodist Revival.' We shall try to trace the influence of Methodism in Parts IV. and V. of this book on the religious and secular life, particularly of Great Britain, because, though difficult, it is less difficult to trace there than elsewhere. We shall give as much consideration to the indirect as the direct results of the Evangelical Revival, which has by-products little anticipated by its original founders.

When John Wesley died, the Methodists of England and the United States numbered 120,233 members, with 511 preachers. Of these, 43,265 members were in the United States, with 198 preachers. This means that at the end of the eighteenth century there were about half a million Methodists in the world. The membership, as has often been shown, must be multiplied by four to make intelligible comparisons with other Church statistics. To-day there are some 40,000,000 Methodists. The actual members number, according to the statistics of 1927, 11,869,388. The general statistical table of world Methodism is a

startling demonstration of the abiding effect of Methodist teaching and practice in America and the British Empire. But a careful study of the foreign missionary work of the Churches of both countries will show how potent a world-influence Methodism has become.

What emerges most conspicuously in the statistical tables of Methodism[1] is her extraordinary success in all new English-speaking countries. In the United States of America nearly 10 per cent. of the population is definitely enrolled in the membership of the various Methodist Churches; if the adherents (including children) be added, the proportion will be probably increased fourfold. These figures, in view of the tremendous future of the American people, are one of the great facts of twentieth-century life too little regarded, although their significance for temperance and social reform, and the quickened public conscience of the United States, has been clearly proved in recent years. It is generally acknowledged that there has been no influence on American political and social life more mportant than the conscience and common sense of Methodism.

The population of the British Colonies and Dominions is very much smaller than that of the United States, but a comparison of Methodist membership with the populations of Canada, Australasia, and South Africa will show that Methodism has the same proportional grip on the religious people of these new countries as on the United States of America.

The numerical development in England has been much less rapid, but, even in England, Methodism has become a great national force, and it will be seen, when we analyse its secular results, that its quickening life has, since the days of Wesley, been one of the greatest formative influences of modern England.

The large variety of Methodist denominations perhaps suggests differences of opinion and development. In England,

[1] See Appendix, *Statistics of Methodism*, 1927.

at all events, differences of doctrine and religious practice have caused, except in one trifling and negligible instance, none of the divisions. In the recent negotiations for Methodist Union it has been clear that divergent governments have made no denominational difference whatever to the common beliefs of the Methodist people. The differences have been on matters of polity. So much have these differences proved to be matters of expediency that a common Methodism has been evolved which sacrifices no principle of vital importance to any of the denominations. It is a notorious fact that political reasons caused the greatest division of Methodism in the United States. The essential oneness on all vital matters of the Methodist denominations is a striking confirmation of the validity and force of the eighteenth-century witness.

It is not within the scope of this work to give even a brief account of the various Methodist communities all over the world. They have a common creed and a common ethos. Differences exist, but they are superficial in character. Methodism is everywhere a common-sense religion for ordinary people. Some of the early institutions of Methodism no longer function, but the preaching of the universal love of God, salvation by faith, the necessity of fellowship, the obligations of love, and the service of love, are everywhere proclaimed, and, even though the shapes of the organization to achieve these ends have changed, the huge Methodist machine is really devised for the proclamation of John Wesley's gospel, and all Methodists still continue to sing it in Charles Wesley's hymns, however many others they add to them.

The Methodism of to-day is not only spread over all parts of the English-speaking world, but, by means of her secular wealth and influence, is playing a great part in the life of the British Empire and the United States. Methodism possesses great properties, universities, colleges, churches, institutions of all kinds, and employs 60,000 ministers to

carry on her work. The mere catalogue of her members and her philanthropies, supported by millions of dollars, makes impressive reading. She stands like a city set upon a hill, and she cannot be hid. She believes in herself, and more and more, after nearly two centuries of neglect, observers from older religious organizations and of different upbringing are beginning to examine her carefully. The influence of Methodism has been specially studied by Professor Halévy of Paris as a vital factor of nineteenth-century English history. And a work of a Belgian Roman Catholic priest, Dr. Maximin Piette, published in 1925, estimated carefully her place in the evolution of Protestantism. Le Père Piette is particularly impressed by the optimism with which Methodists face the future. 'Finally, with great optimism, the Methodism of to-day visualizes the future with confidence; the Christian society which will seize the missionary opportunities offered to it by circumstances is assured of a great destiny.'[1]

Her place and her outlook is so striking that one hardly needs to emphasize the fact that this immense organization is a direct result of the Evangelical Revival.

The success of Methodism has been always due to her missionary inspiration and her simple, practical methods of gathering people together into religious fellowship. She has delivered her message, put it to the test of experience, and regulated individual experiences by the common experience of her converts. Her forms of organization have been simple and popular; she has been elastic in method, but always sufficiently organized to prevent individual licence and eccentricity from causing her dissolution. But missionary zeal has counted most of all. The first hymn of Wesley's own collection remains her inspiration—

> O for a thousand tongues to sing
> My great Redeemer's praise!

[1] Piette 653–4.

The progress of Methodism in America during the formation of that great Western civilization has been almost unchecked and continuous. The apostle of American Methodism, Francis Asbury, was as fitted for his particular work as John Wesley was for his, and in some ways the apostolic labours of Bishop Asbury were even more amazing than those of the English itinerant, of whom he was such a faithful son and follower. He was followed by a succession of apostolic men who gloried in the opportunities afforded them by the crude beginnings of a great nation.

The missionary impulse of Methodism could not be confined to English-speaking countries alone. However impressive Methodism may be to-day in the countries of her birth, her efforts to win the heathen have not been less striking.

The British and American foreign missionary societies are at work in every part of the world. One society has triumphed in one place and another in another. The missionary work, although primarily evangelical, has also been educational, social, medical, and philanthropic. Some of the missionary triumphs have been unsurpassed in the history of the Church, and enthusiasm for world evangelization expresses itself in the splendid generosity, not only of the rich, but the poorest Methodist people. Methodist missions are the glory of Methodism.

Most of the other British missionary societies were the direct result of the Evangelical Revival, or received such vitalization from it as to justify the claim that British foreign missionary activity was its offspring.

Le Père Piette writes quite justly: 'If the first Protestant missions were not the work of the Methodists, the Methodists have at least given them a powerful impetus. The zeal of Wesleyan missionaries, stimulated by Anglo-Saxon gold, gives to their service a philanthropic worth which it would be childish to gainsay, not only among the heathens, where there still exist, as in the times of the apostles, God-fearing men, disgusted with the repulsiveness

of paganism and yearning for a higher form of religion, but also among those Christians where the naturalistic movement detaches a crowd of sentimental souls from religious practices and orthodox beliefs.'[1]

What was true of British was equally true of American Methodists, and the sons of John Wesley the world over have found that the gospel preached to them was a practical rule of life as well as the verifiable truth of God, and have given time and wealth and life to the building up of the great Methodist Church for the salvation of souls and the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God.

# XIV

## ANGLICANISM AND NONCONFORMITY

EVER since the days of Wesley the Evangelical Revival has influenced, not only the Methodist Societies, but all Protestant Churches which have derived from England. But the best method of understanding this influence is to examine the difference made to English religion in the eighteenth century.

The moribund state of eighteenth-century religion in England has been often written about, but never with more precise understanding than by Professor Elie Halévy and le Père Piette, who are giving such profound attention to the condition of English life in the eighteenth century. The objectivity of their French mentality and the clarity of their writing gives a specially judicial value to what they have set down in their books. They write without prejudice, but with a sympathetic intelligence rare amongst outside writers on Methodism. No English investigators seem to have a more thorough knowledge of the facts and problems involved in the religious history of the eighteenth century than these brilliant French and Belgian savants.

Le Père Piette has written in his recent work an excellent summary and analysis of the moral and religious conditions of the eighteenth century. He is aware of the tendency of writers on Methodism to exaggerate the darkness of the age in order to bring the Methodist success into clearer relief, and yet no writer has painted the age in blacker colours. He exposes the indecencies of the Court, the immorality and cynicism of Robert Walpole, the leading statesman, and quotes Voltaire, whose views of English life during his

sojourn in that country are most valuable for their revelation of the low state of religion in England. Voltaire, as is well-known, found religion to be chiefly a subject of ridicule in the circles which he knew, and was not slow himself to ridicule the revival of Arianism—the Modernist movement of the day—in the eighteenth century. He laughed at it for being some centuries behind the times. There can be no doubt that belief in supernatural religion was vanishing away amongst the upper and educated classes of society. The deists had a great influence inside the Church as well as outside of it. Revelation was discounted in religion, and nothing was accepted as true which could not be proved by the narrow experience of the eighteenth century. In the Churches, latitudinarianism was the Christian shadow —or, rather, ecclesiastical shadow—of deism. A state of widespread scepticism existed which effectively paralysed all Christian fervour, and the cynical indifference to the appalling moral laxity and religious ignorance of the people suggested that the Protestant religion had almost ceased to function in England.

Le Père Piette analyses with care the impotence of the Churches to deal with the situation. The impotence of Anglicanism he finds in its Anglicanism—that is to say, its weakness sprang from the disproportionate sense of loyalty to the monarchy and its belief in the divine right of kings. The divine right of kings was the characteristic doctrine of Anglicanism, and when it was broken to pieces by the advent of William the Third, and the most devout Anglicans left the Church, she became the prey of worldly latitudinarians. Le Père Piette argues that the weakness of Anglicanism was inherent in her servile relation to the State; that weakness remained after Wesley, as the bitter wail of Newman in the next century, concerning his mother's inability to nourish her children, reveals.

Le Père Piette writes of the Catholic doctrines of Andrewes and Laud: 'They faded into insignificance in comparison

with the glory given to [the doctrine of] the divine right of kings, a right hereditary, indefectible, a right above all to which resistance was an unpardonable crime—the greatest, indeed, of all crimes. The preponderance of this doctrine in official instructions was such that we might treat it as continental Protestantism treated justification by faith when it called it *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae.* It occupied the first place in the *credo* by which Anglicanism lived. Was it for nothing that the king bore the title of the supreme head of the national Church ? '[1]

This is strongly put, but it must be acknowledged that Erastianism does not of itself make for religion, and when that Erastianism was compelled to substitute allegiance to a dull state in place of a personal loyalty, and lost at the time of the substitution its most earnest Christians, as in the case of the non-jurors, the analysis is worth some reflection. Whatever the cause, Anglicanism was impotent in the early eighteenth century to deal with the moral situation of the time.

Le Père Piette also analyses the causes of the Nonconformist impotence, which he admits, and before doing so inquires carefully as to whether Methodist authors have exaggerated the helplessness of the Nonconformist Churches. He attributes the decay of the Dissenters to the fact that they had given their strength to gain political liberty, and they were exhausted : ' All their life-force seems to have been spent in gaining liberty. Once they had obtained this, they had no power with which to utilize their great victory.'

' They lacked great leaders,' he points out, and they were impoverished by the loss of their most fervent adherents, who, disgusted with Anglican intolerance, had gone to America. Their educated sons were entering the Church of England, and Voltaire said that the Nonconformists were not more than a twentieth of the nation. How different from the days of the Commonwealth !

[1] Piette 176.

Furthermore, he says, heterodox views on the Holy Trinity were undermining the fervour of Presbyterians and Independents. At a great assembly at Salter's Hall, 57 out of 110 ministers refused to sign the creeds. This, as always, means ruin to Christian enthusiasm.

The only force le Père Piette finds making towards constructive and vital Christianity was the Religious Societies—small groups of devout Church people, which were scattered up and down the country at the end of the seventeenth century. Wesley himself derived benefit from these. The Methodist Society, apparently beginning in the Foundery in 1739, was evolved from the Religious Societies. It is interesting to compare the Methodist Society rules of 1743 with the rules of the older Religious Societies, and particularly to note the fact that those of the 'Fetter Lane' Society mark an intermediate stage between the two. The handiwork of John Wesley can be discovered in the 'Fetter Lane' rules. 'If the part played by John Wesley in the religious regeneration of England can be compared with the influence of the sun in the awakening of nature in springtime, let it not be forgotten that a dawn full of promise had preceded the sunrise, however beautiful it may have been. The dawn which announced and began this moral renewal was due to the Religious Societies which came into being at the end of 1678.'[1]

Having stated the views of a learned Belgian priest on the religious conditions of the eighteenth century, rather than those of Methodist authorities, it may be well to consider what difference Professor Halévy, another acute foreign observer, considers Methodism to have made in the Protestant Churches of England. M. Halévy's judgements are not of the less value in that he by no means approves of certain characteristics either of Wesley or his spiritual progeny. He speaks, for instance, of 'their eccentric style of preaching and doctrinal extravagance.' No one, however, has realized

[1] Piette 270.

the historical importance of Methodism as he has. His summary of the influence of Methodism on the Anglicanism and Nonconformity of the time is of indisputable value, and no other writer seems to have given such a succinct account of the facts. While the period of which he writes is 1815, his review is so retrospective as to enable us to see, especially as we keep in mind the facts recited above, what a penetrating influence the Methodist movement exercised on the Church life of England in the eighteenth century.

M. Halévy shows particularly the influence of the evangelical party, the direct offspring of Methodism on the Church of England. Most of the clergy who had worked with Wesley remained in the Church of England. Some of them were more Calvinistic than Wesley, but Halévy shows that their Calvinism was unaggressive; indeed, 'one might almost say, an undoctrinal Calvinism.'[1] The body of wealthy evangelical laymen at Clapham who exercised a beneficent influence on the social life of England had no interest in divisive doctrine. Wilberforce received a blessing from Charles Wesley, then a very old man, which moved him profoundly, and a letter from John, in which slavery was described as 'the sum of all the villanies,' was sent, to encourage him in his anti-slavery campaign. Simeon, the clerical leader and saint of evangelicalism, was an honoured friend of Wesley. The influence of these evangelicals, now called the low or evangelical party of the Church of England, was enormous.

M. Halévy writes: 'To be sure, John Wesley had been driven from the Church of which he was an ordained priest. But he had left a rearguard behind him which persisted in the attempt to realize his original dream—not the creation of a new sect, but the regeneration of the Church herself. Several clergymen, disciples of Wesley and Whitefield, had founded in their parishes, on their individual initiative, little groups of laymen who met for mutual edification and the propagation

[1] See Halévy I. 377–8.

of religious truth. And laymen built chapels to supply the lack of churches, which they maintained at their own cost and under their private control, without consulting either the clergyman of the parish or the bishop of the diocese. Under their direction the old Low Church party was reorganized, no longer, as of old, liberal and rationalist, but pietist, or, as it was termed, evangelical.'

The originators of the movement, he argues, were the Methodist clergy who had not separated from the Church—Walker, Grimshaw, Newton, Venn, and the like, who had all died. There was a danger of dissolution of the movement till it was organized into the evangelical party, through Charles Simeon of Cambridge and the Clapham Sect.

It is true they had few representatives on the episcopal bench, but their influence touched many of the old families. A good instance is that of the Russells. Mr. G. W. E. Russell in several of his books gives evidence of the influence of evangelicalism in the British aristocracy. He was himself a grandson of the fifth Duke of Bedford, and speaks with inner knowledge. His picture of his own childhood gives one a glimpse of the way in which Methodism, through the Evangelicals, had transformed one of the stately homes of England :

My home was intensely evangelical, and I lived from my earliest days in an atmosphere where the salvation of the individual soul was the supreme and constant concern of life. No form of worldliness entered into it, but it was full of good works, of social service, and of practical labour for the poor. All life was lived, down to its minutest detail, ' as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye.' From our very earliest years we were taught the Bible, at first orally, and later on were encouraged to read it, by gifts of handsomely bound copies. As soon as we could speak, we learned evangelical hymns. The Church catechism we were never taught. I was confirmed without learning it. It was said to be too difficult ; it really was too sacramental. We had family prayers twice a day. Each of us had a missionary box. When, on an occasion of rare dissipation, I won

some shillings at 'The Race-Game,' they were impounded for the service of the C.M.S., and an aunt of mine, making her sole excursion into melody, wrote for the benefit of her young friends :

> 'Would you like to be told the best use for a penny ?
> I tell you a use which is better than any—
> Not on toys or on fruit or on sweetmeats to spend it,
> But over the seas to the heathen to send it.'

May my lot be with these evangelical saints from whom I first learned that, in the supreme work of salvation, no human being and no created thing can interfere between the soul and the Creator. Happy is the man whose religious life has been built on the impregnable rock of that belief.[1]

This is a picture, it is true, of a later date—indeed, of a Victorian household—but it portrays the piety of an aristocratic evangelical home, of which there were many. Mr. Russell himself afterwards became a leading Anglo-Catholic layman.

In one respect the picture hardly represents the days of early evangelicalism. The Methodist Revival in the times of Wesley restored the sacramental life of the Church, as will be seen in another chapter, a fact to which we shall call Mr. G. W. E. Russell as witness. But the main effect of Methodism on the Church of England was the development of lay piety, and its influence was a profound one, not only on the Church, but, through such men as Wilberforce and Shaftesbury, on the nation. And the renewed earnestness of the Church of England through the Oxford Movement owed no little debt, as certain of its exponents have shown, to the Evangelical Revival. On the whole, the full weight of the Wesleys' influence on the Church of England was slowly though powerfully felt.

But the effect on Nonconformity was startling and immediate. When the Evangelical Revival broke out, Nonconformity was rapidly dying in England, partly through exhaustion, as le Père Piette has shown, and partly through

[1] *Fifteen Chapters of Autobiography*, G. W. E. Russell, pp. 21–3.

the rationalism of its ministers. The Methodists were by no means popular amongst the Nonconformists; they would not share with them in their political activities, and they professed, as long as Wesley lived, to be Churchmen, and even afterwards only very slowly and by force of circumstances called themselves Dissenters. In point of fact, there are still a good many English Wesleyans who would repudiate that description of themselves, however true it may be.

M. Halévy notes the existence in the early nineteenth century of the new Methodist sects, but asserts that the influence of Wesleyan ideas was not confined to them. 'Wesleyan influence penetrated all the Dissenting bodies, and everywhere it was a spirit of reaction against the rationalism and republicanism of the old Nonconformity.'[1] The dissenting sects of rationalistic tendency were decaying. When the French Revolution broke out, they were swamped by doctrines frankly anti-Christian. There was an atheistic movement in the country, associated with Bentham and Mill, which frightened orthodox Protestants. Liberal or 'Wide Dissent,' as it was called, was accused of paving the way to irreligion. Such Independents and Baptists as had been rejuvenated by the Evangelical Revival increased in numbers. The Presbyterians, who, a century before, were the strongest of the three bodies, became Unitarians and languished. Instead of being a half or two-thirds of the total number of Dissenters in the early nineteenth century, they were only one-twentieth.[2] 'The Arian or Socinian chapels are empty, often no longer used for worship; then the Independents appear on the scene, obtain from negligent trustees possession of the buildings, preach orthodox Christianity, and once more large congregations fill the chapels.'[3]

Moreover, the spirit of anarchic autonomy in Independent Churches, according to Halévy, was modified by the

[1] Halévy I. 365. [2] Ibid. 365. [3] Ibid. 365.

influence of Methodism. 'In Lancashire in 1786 they (the Congregationalists) founded a County Association whose objects were to organize a system of itinerant ministers and to secure their local ministers against indigence.' 'The influence of Methodism was also tending to render Protestant Dissenters political Conservatives.'[1] This, of course, must be understood relatively to the revolutionary opinions in earlier times. Halévy tracks out the influence of Methodism on the political and social life of both Anglicanism and Nonconformity, and is naturally more interested in results in secular history, to which we shall make reference in a later chapter. Sufficient, however, has been said to show, not only that the Methodist sects resulted from the Evangelical Revival, but that the fire which had spread and grown in Methodism had set the Nonconformist bodies aflame, and was even igniting the Church of England. It is impossible to decide, and perhaps idle to speculate, what would have happened to Protestantism if there had been no John Wesley. Apart from some such quickening, it seems as if it must have perished in England, and probably in the English-speaking world. Nothing but a movement which stirred the soul of the Churches to the depths could have saved British Nonconformity. The dead English Presbyterian Churches of the day are an example of what must have been the fate of the others, if it had not been for the evangelical renaissance. The Anglican Church no doubt might have remained a useful branch of the Civil Service, but it needed quickening, and modern Anglicanism, even in its High Church developments, owes more to Wesley than has always been acknowledged. The revival of Christianity in the eighteenth century was a miracle of supernatural power, the value of which it is quite impossible to exaggerate.

To quote the summary of le Père Piette : 'It is unquestionable, generally speaking, that John Wesley caused an outburst of fervour in the Protestant world. Not only those

[1] Halévy I. 370.

disciples who have felt the direct influence of the master, but, in addition, by emulation, Anglicans, Congregationalists, Baptists—in short, all those for whom Christ was still a divine Being, the Arianized Presbyterians being the only exceptions—all experienced a renewal of spiritual life.'[1]

[1]Piette 651.

## XV

## THE WESLEYS AND PROTESTANTISM

LET us now consider the place of Methodism in the Protestant system. What effect had it on the teaching of Luther and Calvin? How did it react on the Protestant organizations of the past? Some of the matters to be mentioned have been discussed in Part II., and can only be referred to in this chapter.

No better treatment of the subject has been written than le Père Piette's book. He definitely places John Wesley's work as '*la réaction dans l'évolution du Protestantisme.*' He argues that Wesley repudiated the characteristic doctrines both of Luther and Calvin, but made no original contribution to doctrine, except in so far as he put a new emphasis on experience. In this matter he would classify him with Schleiermacher and German Pietism, and find the philosophy of them both in the writings of William James. He asserts that, so far as Wesley had a doctrinal system, it was that of the Church of England, and that his doctrine of faith was much nearer the definition of the Council of Trent than Martin Luther's, while his social religion was Catholic rather than Protestant.

To a very large extent this is a true account of Wesley's place in the Church. Le Père Piette, though not denying the validity of Wesley's evangelical experience, rather tends to minimize its value. Perhaps he has given insufficient attention to the confirmation of that experience by millions of Methodists. Wesley's experience is no isolated phenomenon. It is, as is shown in Chapter VIII., really Paul's experience and Luther's. By means of it he is able

to confirm the teaching of Paul and, in essentials, that of Luther. His experience throws light on much of the truth he found in the Anglican formularies, especially as confirmed by the experience of others. He put little faith in speculative theology, and his teaching was much more vividly expressed by Charles Wesley's hymns (with which Père Piette seems less acquainted than with most Methodist writings) than in his own writings. William James would have hardly been accepted by Wesley as his exponent, for the Methodist teaching stands or falls on the objective character of religious experience, which is an open question with the great pragmatist. That such experience is baffling to the analyst because it is living is, of course, true, as Piette suggests in his admirable observation :

' Religious consciousness is an " *esse fluens*," a succession of particular experiences whose complex and transient nature it is impossible to analyse. Consciousness isolated for purposes of study can no more represent living religious experience than a bucket of water can give any idea of a running stream.'[1] But, after all, collective experience, for which, for instance, the class meeting is designed, is a living enforcement of individual experience, and has a value, and a vital value, greater than that of the experience of a single individual. Wesley was always ready, as are his followers, not only to test truth by experience, but to submit his experience to the test of truth. While their experience of God enriches their knowledge of the truth, they do not claim to be propounders of theological novelties, but rather confirmers by experience of the faith once delivered to the saints. As Newman's distinction suggests, their ' notional ' assents become ' real ' by experience.

That Wesley repudiated the decrees of Calvin is true, and in English-speaking nations the essential doctrines of Calvin have in large part, in consequence, perished. If Lutheranism involved Antinomianism, Wesley certainly rejected it.

[1] Piette 652.

Whether it is quite fair to Luther to say it did is perhaps questionable. An unbalanced solifidianism was certainly no teaching of Wesley, but was it Luther's? The danger of Antinomianism was inherent in Luther's system. Harnack admits that 'Lutheranism, wishing to go back to religion, and to it alone, neglected far too much the moral problem, the "Be ye holy, for I am holy."'[1] Whatever may be true of Luther himself, Wesley's acceptance of faith only, involved neither a disuse of means of grace nor a belief in faith which failed to issue in practice. And his emphasis alike of institutional and practical religion did much to save modern organized English Protestantism from the individualistic vagaries which have always been its danger.

There are senses in which the reaction of John Wesley on Protestantism was a Catholic reaction. The emphasis of the social character of religion by means of corporate spiritual life, which is illustrated by the class meeting and the other original social organizations that he introduced, and his emphasis of the Sacraments as embodying the experience of the whole Church of Christ, were almost as important in his conception of Christianity as his doctrine of justification by faith and the witness of the spirit. In some ways the Protestant Reformation in its natural protest against the ecclesiastical abuses of the sixteenth century may have gone too far in the direction of individualism, and a Wesley was needed to restore the balance. His religious method, both inside and outside of Methodism, has shaped modern Protestantism more definitely than any other thing, and Piette is right in placing him as the outstanding modern figure in the Protestant evolution.

Perhaps the note of 'love' in Wesley's teaching marks an influence on Protestantism rarely noticed. Dr. T. P. Forsyth used to be fond of saying that the typical word of Protestantism was Faith, and the typical word of Catholicism Love. Could either word be called typical of Methodism?

[1] Harnack's *History of Dogma* (Williams & Norgate), Vol. VII., p. 267.

Faith working by love is more descriptive of it than either alone.

Harnack and H. B. Workman both accuse Luther of making belief in the doctrine of justification by faith necessary to salvation. That may or may not be an exaggeration, but salvation by dogma soon became the bane of Lutheranism. No such thing could ever be said about Wesley. He had no belief in salvation by belief in any doctrine whatever. Salvation was through faith in God in Christ. Theological formulas, though not without their importance, were always of secondary value to Wesley. He cared most that men should love God and their neighbours. He expressed his views on faith much more in the language of the heart than of the head. The Witness of the Spirit was 'an impression on the Soul' and his own conversion was a 'strange warming of the heart.' He emphasized the love that came through faith more than the faith through which the love came. And his message, of which his brother was never tired of singing, was God's universal love—a love that discovered them more than a love they themselves discovered.

'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, oh my God, it found out me.
O unexampled love!
O all-redeeming grace!
How swiftly didst Thou move
To save a fallen race!
What shall I do to make it known
What Thou for all mankind hast done!

This sense of God's love coming to men is very prominent in the Wesleys. It was a love that found them out and made their lives warm and radiant. And the emphasis of the love of God and the neighbour as the total requirement of the Christian life in its highest ranges and deepest experiences is perhaps more reminiscent of the Catholic than the Protestant devotion. It reminds one more of Francis of Assisi

or of Francis de Sales than of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, or John Knox. It is true that John Wesley sought to find perfect love through faith, and taught that it could be found in that way, but it is also true that he practised love and demanded the practice of love to the brother at all times. His emphasis is on love. He restored love to its Pauline place in Protestant theology. 'The greatest of these is love.'

The effect of this has been noticeable in the fact that Protestant rigour has been gradually softening ever since. Even the Churches which were historically the inheritors of Calvinism have sensibly softened in their religious teaching. The Wesleys, who protested in God's name against the Calvinistic teaching of the eighteenth century and taught the universal love of God to all men, did not foresee some of the universalistic doctrines that would be deduced from such teaching ; nor did they teach a love which was unconcerned about morality ; quite the reverse. But it must be admitted that the influence of the teaching of the width of God's love in Christ, which, as far as modern Protestantism is concerned, may be traced back to the Wesleys, has profoundly modified the Protestant conception of God, and has sometimes, perhaps, expressed itself in a sentimentalism irreconcilable with a conception of a God whom man could honour. However true it is that 'this awful God is ours,' it is also true, as the Wesleys would have been the first to admit, that ours is an awe-ful God. 'Our God is a consuming fire.'

The Wesleys themselves were men of strong emotions. John Wesley, even when reasoning with himself about the nature of faith, concluded that if it were effectively exercised its results must be felt, that is to say, emotionally experienced. The vital emotional character of religion is necessary to any man who believes in the possibility of contact of a man with a God who loves him. And it was this experienced love which vitalized the dry notional Protestantism of eighteenth-century England. In Protestantism, theology and

religion were largely a matter of discussion and reasoning, —an intellectual system. This has been the curse of Protestantism in Germany. German Pietism in the seventeenth century was in many ways analogous to Methodism, and Schleiermacher, Wesley's younger contemporary, was a disciple of the Moravians, and, like Wesley, learnt much from them. Both men owed their discovery of God as personally experienced to their teaching. The influence of Schleiermacher on the religious life of Germany in the nineteenth century can hardly be overestimated. His insistence on religious experience as a fact was quite as strong as Wesley's, though his philosophical treatment of the subject was speculative and systematic, and in a mode Wesley either could not or would not pursue. Dr. H. B. Workman and le Père Piette classify him with Wesley, and place him higher as a philosopher.

But it must not be forgotten that Schleiermacher was no Wesley. He gave to experience one value, and to objective fact another, thus anticipating Ritschl. Perhaps his heresies have had as great an influence as his doctrine of experience. He speculated on truth outside the range of practical divinity. Schleiermacher lived an exclusively literary life, but Wesley was a practical man who devised organizations whereby experience could be cultivated and corroborated, with the result that his Societies abide as living laboratories of Christian experience and perpetual centres of practical religion.

German Pietism and the later affirmation of the validity of experience by Schleiermacher are evidences of reaction against the mere intellectualism of Lutheran theology. No people can live on barren formulas either in Germany or elsewhere. Against the tendency of the Reformed doctors to make salvation dependent on intellectual notions, and to regard Christianity as an intellectual system, revolt was certain. While it is true that the mediaeval schoolmen were open to a similar criticism, the Catholic emphasis on social

religion made it impossible to ignore the emotional life. This has been done with disastrous results more than once in Protestantism. Methodism, like Catholicism, remembered the social and emotional side of human nature. While the claims of the individual soul must be insisted upon, especially when they are disregarded by the excessive social emphasis of Institutional Religion, as in the time of the Reformation, the individualistic emphasis also has its dangers. The chief value of Wesley to the Protestantism of his time and ours was that he held the balance between individualism and collectivism in religion, and his teaching and institutions have flourished because that balance has, on the whole, remained true in the religious organizations which sprang from the Evangelical Revival. Dr. H. B. Workman goes even further, and writes : 'The conjunction of belief in the authority of an organic Church with insistence upon the value and reality of individual experience as the final test gives to Methodism its special position in the Catholic Church.'[1]

In fact, to state a personal confession of faith, though it may be set down as no more than the prejudice of a Methodist, I would claim that no man since the time of the apostles has had so good an understanding of essential Christianity as John Wesley. I do not mean by that that the Church has produced no greater thinkers than he ; it has produced many ; but he saw clearly that Christianity was essentially a life, and that action was of more importance than thought, and that love and faith mattered more than any sort of speculations or notions. While he had no sympathy at all with irrationalism, and never *substituted* feeling for thinking, he got the right perspective. A man of exclusively intellectual life, however able, lacks, on account of his aloofness, a vital element in the understanding of Christianity. Wesley, though a trained academic, was a man of affairs, and though an intellectual, he did not despise the emotional life.

[1] Workman : *N. H. M.* 16.

More than any other eminent religious leader, he touched life and human beings at all points necessary for deep and sound judgements. He learnt the doctrine by doing the will of God, not merely as an exalted individual who spent his time amongst books, but as a practical missionary amongst men. He had a religious experience of his own, but he regulated some conclusions to which it might have led him by entering into the experience of others. His practice of social religion was as valuable to him as his personal quest of God and truth. He devoted his great powers with a single eye to the glory of God, and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the making of a series of experiments in the creation of a religious organization which was to be the spiritual home for multitudes of people as ignorant of true religion as the early Christians, and which combined in itself the vital characteristics of historical Catholicism and Protestantism without ignoring or exaggerating the special features of either. His religion and his religious system held the balance truly between individualistic and social religion.

## XVI

## THE WESLEYS AND MODERN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The nineteenth century gave birth to three important religious movements among Protestants—the Salvation Army, Christian Science, and Anglo-Catholicism, the last of which, though at present influential only in the British Empire, may ultimately prove to have the most far-reaching effects. It is partly by an examination of these movements that we shall be able to estimate the influence of the Evangelical Revival, and the question at once arises whether any of them is either directly or indirectly derived from John Wesley.

Christian Science, of course, is not. Its philosophy is of the sort with which Wesley had no sympathy whatever, although its appeal to experience and its public testimony meetings have probably sprung, however indirectly, from Methodism. But, on the whole, Christian Science is more akin to the theosophies, mysticism, and speculation which Wesley detested than to the gospel he preached.

It is different both with the Salvation Army and the Anglo-Catholic movement, which derive, the one directly and the other at least partially, from the Evangelical Revival. More than half the leaders of the Oxford Movement were devout evangelicals. The Salvation Army, so far as one can see, could not have come into being if there had been no Evangelical Revival. The Anglo-Catholic Movement might have done, but one of the strongest strands of the cord which connects it with past history is the Evangelical Revival; and the changes in the Church due to the witness of

the Wesleys had much to do with its vitality. The Oxford Movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have many similarities, and the influence on the Church of England of the sacramental practices and teaching of the Wesleys during the whole of their lifetime was perhaps greater than has been generally recognized. The Salvation Army and the Anglo-Catholic cultus seem as far apart as the poles, but may it not be that they are each one-sided developments, perhaps even exaggerations of different particular doctrines of the Evangelical Revival?

The Methodist Movement was not only a missionary appeal to outsiders, but a revival of devotional, and especially of sacramental, practice in the Church of England. The Wesleys, with all their fervid evangelicalism, never ceased to be sacramentalists, and there is no antithesis more false than the common one of sacrament and gospel. The Wesleys found the Lord's Supper a source of evangelical power, and also a necessary check to the individualistic extravagances of some exponents of doctrines such as justification by faith 'only.' The more the Wesleyan movement is studied, the more will its admirable balance be admired. It may be asserted with some confidence that, if Wesley would have rejected some of the mediaeval practices and teaching of the Anglo-Catholics, he would have repudiated with equal vigour the non-sacramental character of the Salvation Army. The purpose of this chapter is to show that, notwithstanding their evangelicalism, the sacramental teaching of the Wesleys, with certain qualifications, definitely relates itself to the churchmanship of the Anglo-Catholics.

Le Père Piette is inclined to think Wesley would find himself more at home, were he living to-day, in the Salvation Army than in modern Methodism. He seems to think that the open-air appeals, the presence of the poor, and the fervid evangelism of the Army, would appeal to him more strongly than many wealthy suburban chapels. 'À Londres, où l'on prétend determiner la chapelle que fréquente un homme à

la marque de son automobile, on assure que les Rolls Royce conduisent aux églises Wesleyennes.'[1] Where Methodism is no longer missionary, Wesley would no doubt prefer the Army, but in the denomination that bears his name Wesley would find practised to a large extent activities which Piette assumes to be now a monopoly of the Salvation Army. Wesley would no doubt also have to think himself into the practices necessitated by a Society which no longer assumed as part of its life the services and sacraments of the Church of England, but had its own. This great difference, of course, necessitates the regular normal Methodist Church service, whose place in Wesley's time was largely taken by the parish church. It is certain, too, that his approval of the Salvation Army's splendid evangelistic and social service to the poor would be qualified by his distress at the absence of sacramental devotions. The Salvation Army was the work of an ex-Methodist minister, closely modelled on the methods of the Evangelical Revival, and adapted to the conditions of the nineteenth century with a skill not inferior to Wesley's own ; but the real difference lies not so much in the more sensational methods of the Army as in its dissociation from the historic life and sacraments of the Christian Church. It is too early yet to say what that cleavage will mean in the long run, or whether it will be lessened and bridged over ; but it may be dogmatically asserted that Wesley would have criticized the defectiveness of the Salvation Army in these particulars.

There is no greater mistake than to suppose that Wesley ceased to be a High Churchman after 1738. The popular argument that the Wesley before 1738 and after were two different men, with different views, is a modern Methodist myth which serious investigation proves to be without foundation. There were certain puerilities of his early ministry which Wesley outgrew, and the importance of certain beliefs and practices were seen in a new perspective,

[1] Piette 639.

not merely by the illumination of his conversion, but by his practical experiences and busy occupation with affairs. But the idea that Wesley was a sacramentalist of the Anglo-Catholic type before 1738 and anti-sacramentalist after is without the least foundation in fact. The Wesleys in belief, assertion, and practice were always sacramentalists of a comparatively High Church type, and wished their people to be the same. This does not mean that they were Anglo-Catholics. Certain current Anglo-Catholic beliefs they would have repudiated, and did, in fact, repudiate them. But Anglo-Catholicism is a wide term. All Anglo-Catholics are not extremists. The name might possibly be wide enough to include Charles and more doubtfully even John Wesley, but, in any case, we are on safe ground in calling their sacramental belief and practice ' High Church.' And, what is more, their sacramental practice was as much an innovation in the eighteenth-century Church as some of the Anglo-Catholic practices have been in our own times.

The question of Wesley's Churchmanship has always been a matter of hot dispute, nor has the discussion often been conducted in a judicial spirit. Methodist apologetic has striven at times to minimize the High Church doctrine of the Wesleys' sacramental teaching. In the recent British controversies on the Prayer Book, the Archbishop of Canterbury appealed to Charles Wesley's hymns in support of certain sacramental doctrines with which few modern Methodists sympathize, and Bishop Knox, from an ultra-Protestant standpoint, has written warnings against them. Mr. J. A. Kensit criticized very strongly certain quotations of Charles Wesley's sacramental hymns in a pamphlet by the present writer,[1] and told him personally that he considered them dangerous to Protestantism. While one does not claim Mr. Kensit as an authority on doctrine, he is a fair and candid representative of popular Protestant feeling in England.

[1] *The Lord's Supper*, by J. E. Rattenbury (The Epworth Press).

Furthermore, le Père Piette calls attention 'to the emphasis laid by John Wesley on the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; by this insistence he only stresses the teaching of the High Church theologians his parents had taught him to love.'

The fact that outsiders of such different schools should regard the Wesleys' hymns and teaching as supporting sacramental views of which one group approves, and another disapproves, should make some Methodists question the objectivity of some of their own judgements on the sacramentalism of the Wesleys.

Dr. Rigg's able polemical work, *The Churchmanship of John Wesley*, argues that Wesley was not a High Churchman in the modern sense of the word. Much of the argument is unanswerable. It must not be forgotten, however, that the Diaries of Wesley, deciphered since Dr. Rigg wrote his book, throw new light on the question. Furthermore, Dr. Rigg's treatment of the sacramentalism of the Wesleys omits consideration of certain relevant facts which, in combination with the revelations of the Diaries, compel us to come to different conclusions, at least on the sacramental question.

It may be useful to inquire what correspondence exists between the Wesleys and the Anglo-Catholic cultus, particularly as to sacramental doctrine and practice.

As to doctrine: *John Wesley definitely rejected transubstantiation:*

'No such change of the substance of the bread into the substance of the body can be inferred from our Saviour's words, "This is My body"; for it is not said, "This is turned into My body," but "This is My body"; which, if taken literally, would rather prove the substance of the bread to be His body. Therefore, Cardinal Cajetan acknowledges, it is nowhere said in the gospel that the bread is changed into the body of Christ; but they have it from the authority of the Church.

'It is further evident that the words are not to be taken in their proper sense; for it is called bread as well after consecration as before it (1 Cor. x. 17, xi. 26–8). So that what was called His body was also bread at the same time!'[1]

*John Wesley denied the corporal presence of Christ in the elements and disbelieved in the adoration of the elements:*

'We freely own that Christ is to be adored in the Lord's Supper; but that the elements are to be adored we deny. If Christ is not corporally present in the host, they [Roman Catholics] grant their adoration to be idolatry. And that he is not corporally present anywhere but in heaven, we are taught; Acts i. 2, iii. 21.'[2]

*John Wesley denied the sacrifice of the Mass:*

'To have a perfect sacrifice daily repeated is irreconcilable to the apostle.'[3]

*John Wesley criticized the genuflexions, crossings, ceremonies, and the like of the Mass.*[4]

While Anglo-Catholicism is a loose term comprehending believers in Roman doctrine with simple Christians who feed on Christ through sacramental devotion, but do not accept the views of extremists, it must be admitted that such doctrines as are taught and implied by much Anglo-Catholic devotion, to which Protestants rightly object, have no parallel whatever in the teaching either of John or Charles Wesley; furthermore, there is no evidence that in their Oxford and Georgia days the Wesleys were tainted with the errors of Rome.[5]

At the same time, the Wesleys did not hold the views on the Lord's Supper held by many modern Protestants. They wisely avoided exact definition of a mystical belief which it is always perilous to define. Their views, while definitely anti-Roman, were those of English High Churchmen, in all

[1] *W. W.* X. 114. [2] Ibid. X. 116. [3] Ibid. X. 116.
[4] Ibid. X. 118. [5] See *W. J.* I. 167 *n.*

probability not very different from those of many of the early promoters of the Oxford Movement. They were true and devout sacramentalists.

They believed in a *mystical relationship between the consecrated bread and Christ's body.*[1] Perhaps they would have accepted the Bishop of Manchester's term 'transvaluation.' *They believed in the sacrament as an outward channel and means of the reception of inward grace.* In passages of his standard sermon on 'The Means of Grace' Wesley says, 'Is not the eating of that bread, and the drinking of that cup, the outward visible means whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased by the body of Christ once broken and the blood of Christ once shed for us? Let all therefore who truly desire the grace of God, eat that bread and drink that cup.'[2]

Also, in commenting on 'our daily bread,' Wesley says in another standard sermon that many ancient Fathers regarded daily bread as sacramental bread, and refers to the reception of the bread as 'daily received in the beginning by the whole Church of Christ, and highly esteemed, till the love of many waxed cold, as the grand channel whereby the grace of His Spirit was conveyed to the souls of all the children of God.'

Hence they *believed in it, not merely as a means of grace, but as the grand channel of grace.*

*Furthermore, they believed in it as a channel of every kind of grace,* as the following incidents and statements show.

On November 10, 1739, as we have seen, Wesley was greatly influenced by the testimony of a woman, who may have been his mother, that she received the assurance of salvation in 'the breaking of the bread.'[3] Whether the woman who gave this testimony was his mother or not is not

[1] *W. W.* X. 114. [2] Ibid. V. 183. [3] See Chapter XI.

important. A like testimony was given by others, as the *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* show. But their mother's well-known experience evidently did impress both John and Charles Wesley. The verses on her tombstone, written by Charles, contained the lines:

> The Father then revealed His Son,
> Him in the broken bread made known.

It is significant that in 1828 a later generation of Methodists erased the lines. Nothing is more indicative of the later Methodist minimization of sacramental worship. Wesley believed that the Lord's Supper was actually a converting ordinance. On June 27, 1740, he called his people to witness to this fact.

'Ye are the witnesses. For many now present know, the very beginning of your conversion to God (perhaps, in some, the first deep conviction) was wrought at the Lord's Supper. Now one single instance of this kind overthrows the whole assertion' (to the contrary). On Saturday, June 28, he writes: 'I showed at large: That the Lord's Supper was ordained by God to be a means of conveying to men either preventing or justifying or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities.'

The Wesleys believed in the duty of *constant* communion.

Whatever was true of Wesley's early views of Holy Communion was always true of them. Those views he summed up in his *Journal* after his discussion with Molther.[1] Whatever changes he may have undergone in his views of the ministry, his sacramental opinions underwent no change. In 1788 he republished an early—a pre-conversion—sermon on 'Constant Communion,' with the following note as preface:

'The following Discourse was written above five-and-fifty years ago for the use of my pupils at Oxford. I have added very little, but retrenched much, as I then used more words than I do now. But I thank God I have not yet seen

[1] See Chapter XI., pp. 131–4.

cause to alter my sentiments in any point which is therein delivered.'[1]

As with the other doctrines of John Wesley, their true literary medium is the hymns of Charles Wesley. People who wish to minimize the sacramentalism of John, and who blame Charles for the disagreements of primitive with modern Methodists, affirm that John objected to some of his brother's hymns. It is quite true that he thought some of them were tainted with mysticism and taught final perseverance, but the Holy Communion hymns do not happen to be of that category. These hymns, 166 in number, more numerous than on any other single subject on which Charles Wesley published verses, were bound up with an extract from Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation* and Dr. Brevint's *High Church Manual on the Sacraments*, and were the *joint* publication of John and Charles Wesley. As John Wesley declined to be responsible for the hymns of his brother which he disapproved, it is impossible to draw any other inference from the *joint* publication of the sacramental hymns than that they expressed the common sentiments of both brothers.

Dr. Brevint, a Dean of Lincoln, wrote a treatise on the Eucharist under the following heads.

Concerning the Holy Eucharist:

'As it is a memorial of the sufferings and death of Christ.
'As it is a sign of present graces.
'As it is a pledge of future glory.
'As it is a sacrifice.
'(*a*) a commemorative sacrifice.
'(*b*) the sacrifice of ourselves.'

The hymns of the Wesleys were written to illustrate Dr. Brevint's exposition, and were arranged under precisely the same heads. In these hymns we shall find confirmation of all the beliefs set out above, with evidence as to the depth

[1] *W. W.* VII. 142.

of the Wesleys' beliefs in the mystical presence of Christ, the value of commemorating, not only his death, but its sacrificial character, their sense of communion with the Church triumphant as well as the Church militant, and their deep reverence and constant use of the ordinance as the central, regular act of worship. It is, of course, impossible to quote more than a few lines from a few of the hymns. The best of them are amongst Wesley's greatest hymns, and are in general use, though not exclusively at Holy Communion. These hymns indicate the fact that full sacramental valuation of Holy Communion does not depend on a belief in transubstantiation nor adoration of the elements.

Here are a few verses which define the Wesleys' views of the sacramental elements as far as they ever define them.

No local deity
We worship, Lord, in Thee:
Free Thy grace and unconfined,
Yet it here doth freest move;
In the means Thy love enjoin'd
Look we for Thy richest love.[1]

The sign transmits the signified,
The *grace* is by the means applied.[2]

The mystic flesh of Jesus eat.[3]

But they decline to give exact definition of a doctrine, as hymns 57 and 59 and several others plainly show. Here are typical verses:

How can Heavenly Spirits rise
By earthly matter fed;
Drink herewith divine supplies
And eat immortal bread?
Ask the Father's wisdom *how*;
Him that did the means ordain!
Angels round our altars bow
To search it out in vain.[4]

[1] *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* 63.
[2] Ibid. 71.
[3] Ibid. 71.
[4] Ibid. 57.

How He did these creatures raise,
And make this bread and wine
Organs to convey His grace
To this poor soul of mine,
I cannot the way descry,
Need not know the mystery;
Only this I know—that I
Was blind, but now I see.[1]

The general view of the Wesleys on the sacramental feast is clear enough. They believed it to be a true channel of grace of special significance—

This Eucharistic feast
Our every want supplies.[2]

And it is really sacramental; it is not merely a symbol of grace, but also an instrument for communicating it; it is a live wire.

In His ordinances still,
Touch His sacramental clothes;
Present in His power to heal,
Virtue from His body flows.[3]

It is evident that the Wesleys' sacramental teaching was challenged, but Charles Wesley answers the challenge in such verses as:

Ah, tell us no more
The spirit and power
Of Jesus our God
Is not to be found in His life-giving food!

Receiving the bread,
On Jesus we feed:
It doth not appear,
His manner of working; but Jesus is here![4]

One hymn shows that the Wesleys would have made no objection to the much criticized *epiklesis* in the prayer of consecration of the Deposited Prayer Book. They sung it a century and a half ago.

[1] *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* 59.
[2] Ibid. 4.
[3] Ibid. 39.
[4] Ibid. 92.

Come, Holy Ghost, Thine influence shed,
And realize[1] the sign;
Thy life infuse into the bread,
Thy power into the wine.

Effectual let the tokens prove,
And made by heavenly art,
Fit channels to convey Thy love
To every faithful heart.[2]

Two of the greatest of Charles Wesley's sacramental hymns are 'Victim Divine'[3] and 'O God of our forefathers, hear.'[4] They have been said to teach the sacrifice of the Mass. 'Victim Divine' unquestionably teaches the real presence.

We need not now go up to heaven,
To bring the long-sought Saviour down;
Thou art to all already given,
Thou dost e'en now Thy banquet crown:
To every faithful soul appear,
And show Thy real presence here!

But the real presence is not necessarily identified in this hymn with the elements. Holy Communion may mean communion with the Holy One, who is really present amongst His own people. That is what the words seem to suggest. But it must be admitted that the words of both these hymns, taken by themselves without reference to their context and purpose, *might* be interpreted in the Roman sense, particularly the verse:

With solemn faith we offer up,
And spread before Thy glorious eyes
That only ground of all our hope,
That precious bleeding sacrifice,
Which brings Thy grace on sinners down,
And perfects all our souls in one.

[1] Realize = make real.
[2] *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* 72.
[3] Ibid. 114.
[4] Ibid. 125.

But if read in their context such an interpretation is quite inadmissible, as any reader of Brevint on *The Holy Eucharist as the Memorial of a Sacrifice* will discover, and that is the section of Brevint's manual these two hymns illustrate. To keep in memory the sacrificial aspects of our Lord's death by symbol as well as teaching is quite a different thing from repeating a sacrifice. These hymns expound the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews; they do not, like the Roman Mass, contradict it.

One more group should be mentioned—the hymns that glory in the Communion of the Saints. They make us realize that the Church triumphant in Holy Communion is at one with the Church militant. Two noble instances of this must be noticed. Charles Wesley's memorial hymn to his mother is one,

> What are these arrayed in white?

and the other contains the glorious lines:

> The Church triumphant in Thy love,
> Their mighty joys we know;
> They sing the Lamb in hymns above,
> And we in hymns below.
>
> Thee in Thy glorious realm they praise,
> And bow before Thy throne,
> We in the Kingdom of Thy grace:
> The Kingdoms are but one.[1]

Not only is the Communion of Saints sung, but the communion also of saints and angels, of all spirits visible and invisible, who join with erring mortals in the devotions of the holy table.

> Angels in fixt amazement
> Around our altars hover,
> With eager gaze
> Absorb the grace
> Of our Eternal Lover.[2]

[1] *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* 96. [2] Ibid. 162.

And the greatest of Wesley's hymns of consecration—

> Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;
> God of all-redeeming Grace;
> O Thou who camest from above—

are the hymns whereby Methodists made their vows of consecration at the table of the Lord.

It is perhaps necessary to add that John Wesley's teaching on 'Constant Communion' is not without the musical accompaniment of Charles Wesley's hymns. In the last poem of the book he argues that the degeneracy of the age has been caused by the neglect of constant communion.

> Why is the faithful seed decreased,
> The life of God extinct and dead?
> The *daily* sacrifice is ceased,
> And charity to heaven fled.
>
> Sad mutual causes of decay,
> Slackness and vice together move;
> Grown cold, we cast the means away,
> And quench the latent spark of love.[1]

It is quite clear that the Anglo-Catholic zeal for sacramental worship does not exceed this. This was not merely the teaching of the pre-conversion days of the Wesleys. The hymns were published in 1745. The Wesleys were not the only Methodists who were sacramentalist, as is proved by the fact that this hymn-book went into more editions than any other they published. What was true of the Wesleys was also true of Whitefield and Howel Harris.[2] The Sacramental Revival was general wherever the Methodist gospel was preached. Their doctrine, though not Roman nor Anglo-Catholic (where that follows the Romans), was high sacramental doctrine. And this popular book of so large a number of hymns is an unanswerable evidence of the

[1] *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* 166.
[2] See G. W. E. Russell, *Evangelical Movement*, p. 17.

sacramental character of the Great Revival. The neglect of the Eucharist by evangelicals in the early nineteenth century was deplored by their most honoured leaders, as, for instance, Charles Simeon.[1] It is quite possible that we should have been spared the Romanizing of the Church of England to-day if Methodists had been faithful to the sacramental as well as the evangelical elements of the Revival of the eighteenth century.

What always matters more for an understanding of John Wesley than his writings is his practice. The newly deciphered Diaries have thrown sufficient light upon that to make it clear that what he preached in his sermon on 'Constant Communion' he practised. In a valuable article on the sacramental teaching of Wesley in the *London Quarterly Review*, July 1923, the Rev. T. H. Barratt, by means of a careful examination and analysis of the Diaries, has proved the unaltering sacramental habit of John Wesley. The Diaries of Wesley are very incomplete, but they exist for the whole year 1740, in which entries show that Wesley communicated once every four days—ninety-one times in the year. And the Diaries of the last years of his life—December 1782 to January 1790—show, on analysis, that Wesley communicated once in five days. When it is remembered, as Mr. Barratt justly observes, that Wesley was all the time itinerating, travelling and preaching over three kingdoms, it is very remarkable that he should have communicated with such frequency and regularity. In most of the villages and country towns where he preached there were no week-day Communions in the parish churches, hence we shall hardly be wrong in concluding that he communicated every day that he found it possible to do so.

No other practice would have been consistent with his sermon on 'Constant Communion,' in which he carefully says he does not mean 'frequent,' but constant. More than this, according to Mr. Barratt, it was his custom to

[1] See G. W. E. Russell, *Evangelical Movement*, pp. 53, 82.

communicate once a day for the twelve days after Christmas. This intention is indicated in his *Journal* for Christmas 1775 : 'During the twelve festival days we had the Lord's Supper daily—a little emblem of the primitive Church.'

That this custom was no private idiosyncrasy of Wesley is supported by the advice he gave to the new American Church in 1784. 'I advise the elders to administer the Supper of the Lord on every Lord's day.' And in his *Journal* he makes repeated references to the multitudes of communicants in the Methodist services. He was frequently embarrassed by their number. Communion after morning prayer actually went on till three and four o'clock in the afternoon. He speaks of 600, 800, and sometimes over a thousand communicants at a single service. At St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, in April 1789, 'it was said the number of communicants was about 500—more than went there in the whole year before the Methodists were known in Dublin.'

One of the features of the Evangelical Revival was quite obviously a revival of the Lord's Supper. It must not be forgotten that this sacrament was little observed in the eighteenth century in the Church of England. Secker, when Bishop of Oxford, in addressing his clergy in 1741, pleaded that 'a sacrament might be interposed in the long interval between Whitsuntide and Christmas.' In most parish churches there were only three or four celebrations a year. While there were churches in which the sacrament was administered frequently and regularly, they were the exception. The Methodist habit of going to sacrament in crowds was unexampled. But what else could happen with people who were educated on Dr. Brevint's writings and Charles Wesley's hymns, and who knew the regular practice of John Wesley, their idolized father in God ?

Dr. Abbey asserts that after the reign of Queen Anne the sacramental observance began to decline, but notes the improvement as the century drew towards its close. 'Previous to the time when the Methodist organization

became unhappily separated from the National Church, the sermons of Wesley and his preachers were sometimes followed by a large accession of communicants at the parish church.' Here we see the direct influence of the Wesleys, which probably accounts also for the following statement of Dr. Abbey's: 'Before the end of the century there was doubtless some improvement. In many parish churches the general custom of a quarterly administration was broken through in favour of a monthly one, and in many cathedrals the sacrament might once more be received on the Lord's day.'[1]

Mr. G. W. E. Russell says somewhere in his voluminous writings that the Evangelical Revival of the sacraments paved the way for the Oxford Movement. The evangelicals in the Church, at least those of the nineteenth century, were not generally sacramentalists, it is true, but their cultivation of personal piety was deep and devout, and was the foundation of the piety of Newman and a majority of the Oxford Movement leaders. Dr. Augustin Leger, in his introduction to le Père Piette's work, regards Newman as a spiritual son of Wesley. 'Du mouvement d'Oxford, dont la filiation spirituelle avec John Wesley se démontrerait.' Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith attributes the Catholic revival to the joint influences of the Romantic Movement and the Evangelical Revival. '"Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." That cry had gone up and down England during the second half of the last century on the lips of Wesley and his preachers, and though, as a corporate movement, the Evangelical Revival had passed beyond Anglican borders, much of its influence still remained, even in homes which, like Keble's, repudiated allegiance to it. John Wesley and Walter Scott, those two incongruous names, stand side by side as the forerunners who prepared the way for Anglo-Catholicism.'[2]

It is clear that the Oxford Movement and the Evangelical

[1] *English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, by Abbey & Overton, p. 454.
[2] *Anglo-Catholicism*, Sheila Kaye-Smith, p. 32.

Revival were closely related. The piety of the evangelicals was too individualistic for the originators of Anglo-Catholicism, hence the sacramentalism of the Wesleys, comparatively quiescent for a century, revived once more at Oxford. Unfortunately, the ritualistic fringes became too conspicuous in the new movement, and it was not practised with the sense of proportion that characterized Wesley, but the fervour with which the new school practised sacramental devotion is closely paralleled not more by the ritualism of the Holy Club than by the devotion of the Methodists of the Evangelical Revival.

It may perhaps be asked how it was that sacramental devotion languished in English Methodism after Wesley's death. Some reasons are clear. Wesley left his Society without sufficient ordained ministers to provide for adequate administration of the sacraments, and the Methodists were less and less willing to communicate at the parish churches. Wesley was the link between Methodism and Anglicanism, and the separation, though not formal, soon became actual after his death. The question of administration of the sacrament was the chief cause of discussion, and even, in one case, of separation, at the end of the eighteenth century. The Methodist New Connexion largely resulted from the desire of the people to have sacraments from the hands of their own preachers.

After the death of Wesley there was much debate as to the relation of Methodism to the Established Church, and four years of serious unsettlement ensued. It was not till 1795 that the ' Plan of Pacification ' was adopted, whereby qualified permission was given for the observance of the Lord's Supper in Methodist chapels.

Mr. Barratt's account of the results of these controversies is noteworthy. Speaking of the ' Plan of Pacification,' he writes :

> The permission was limited, and hedged about by strange and various restrictions. The sacrament must not be administered in

any place without the express consent of Conference, or without the wish of the majority of the trustees, leaders, and stewards. Another restriction, which strikes us in these latter days with amazement, provided that—the sacrament shall never be administered on those Sundays on which it is administered in the parish church ! For the same reason it was enacted that the sacrament should be administered in Methodist chapels ' in the evening,' in order to avoid ' Church hours ' and the appearance of a rival altar. And so there came into being a thing entirely new to Methodism—the Sunday evening communion service—and Wesley's wonderful morning sacramental service was forgotten. All this was done out of deference to the Church of England ! But the Methodists have paid a sad price for the pathetic loyalty of their fathers to their old, unkindly mother. Adam Clarke, writing in 1816, said : ' The Methodists in England have incomparably more grace and more stability since the introduction of the sacraments than before.' But those four years of prohibition, followed by the restrictions of 1795, created a tradition which went far to annul the teaching and example of John Wesley, and sowed seeds of which we reap the harvest even to this day.[1]

There were probably, in addition, certain psychological causes of the decline of sacramental devotion in early nineteenth-century Methodism. The right to administer was given to all preachers in full connexion. These men were not ordained. The innovation must have been unacceptable to many Methodists, as it was in direct contravention to Wesley's beliefs and practice. Our information is too slight to justify very confident statements, but it seems highly probable that a consequence of the confusion of the times, and the wholesale authorization of unordained preachers, would be to create doubt in the minds of both ministers and people as to whether the sacraments administered by the preachers were valid sacraments. John Wesley's famous ' Korah ' sermon must have influenced many minds. Methodists of the day would not forget Wesley's repeated exhortation to his people to communicate in the parish churches, and, while most of them would follow the directions of Conference, many would inevitably feel uneasy about the

[1] *London Quarterly Review*, July 1923.

matter. All this probably militated against sacramental practice. When the Oxford Movement sprang up, the Methodists reacted against it, and this, too, would cause disparagement of the sacraments. Moreover, in the early nineteenth century Wesleyan Methodism had in its love-feasts and class meetings, institutions which supplied some of the spiritual needs met by the Eucharist. It must not be forgotten that these denominational means of grace were, in the days of their fervour, means of a genuine Holy Communion. In the early nineteenth century Methodism was hardening down into a separate denomination, and there would be a tendency perhaps to emphasize services which were sectarian and separatist in character rather than those which were Catholic and continuous with other Church life. There never has been a time in Wesleyan Methodism when Sacramentalism has lapsed. There have always been ministers and laymen who were faithful to the Wesleys' conception of the sacraments, although sometimes their numbers have been comparatively small. There have been encouraging signs of sacramental revival in recent years.

The parallel between Anglo-Catholicism and the Wesleys is not striking except in Eucharistic observance, and even then Wesley did not hold doctrines tainted with Romanism, though his sacramental devotion was as fervent as that of the Anglo-Catholics. On baptism he did not repudiate baptismal regeneration, it is true, but he shows little interest in the question, and, while he would not deny that a baby was regenerated in infant baptism, what he wanted to know of a man was, ' Are you regenerate now ? '

In his treatise on baptism, 1756, he says, ' By baptism we who are by nature children of wrath are made children of God. And this regeneration which the Church in so many places ascribes to baptism is more than barely being admitted into the Church, though commonly connected therewith. . . By water as a means we are regenerated or born again. . . . Herein a principle of grace is infused which

will not be wholly taken away unless we quench the Holy Spirit of God by long-continued wickedness.'[1] Wesley's sermon on the new birth should be read in conjunction with this in order to prevent misunderstandings. Dr. Rigg was right in claiming that the Methodist beliefs about baptism have always been various. They certainly are to-day. I once heard baptism discussed at a gathering of eight or nine Wesleyan ministers, and there were eight or nine different doctrines propounded at that meeting!

In the matter of the apostolic succession, Lord Chancellor King's book caused Wesley to change his mind; after reading it he called episcopal succession from the apostles a fable, and held views more akin to those of the Presbyterian divines. A presbyter was a New Testament 'episcopos.' It must not be thought that Wesley believed in no apostolic succession because he rejected episcopal succession. What he disbelieved was that bishops and presbyters were of orders inherently different. He thought a presbyter had the rights that a bishop claimed. It is quite evident that he held that orders could only be given by men who had orders. Otherwise, why should he have troubled to give orders himself? He gave them because he believed that ordination, which in the Church of England was only given by bishops, was really the function of the whole presbyterate. He held that he, a presbyter, was a New Testament bishop. There is no evidence at all that he thought 'orders' could be given by any other persons than bishops or presbyters. He was, in this matter, not a High Church Episcopalian, but a High Church Presbyterian. Whether he taught that there was a special grace bestowed or transmitted by the laying on of hands is undemonstrable, but he obviously thought that authority to administer sacraments could only be transmitted by that method. The theory that he was inconsistent in his ordinations, because he generally

[1] *W. W.* X. 185.

ordained for work in particular localities and would not allow his ordinées to exercise priestly functions all over England, rises from a misunderstanding. His *authorization* through ordination of preachers to administer the sacraments did not necessarily *license* them to act in all places, if one may make a simple distinction. His licence depended on the locality in which they were stationed, and he would not give it in places where properly authorized and reputable English priests were responsible. There is not the least evidence that Wesley held the view of most modern Methodists, the writer included, that the power of ordination rests in the hands of the living Church, and is not dependent on any ministerial succession, episcopal or presbyteral. It is equally true that Wesley cannot be claimed by Anglicans as holding their views on the priesthood.

It is sometimes said that his plain dealing with bishops, when he made them understand that if the two clashed he should follow his own conscience and not their commands, as, for instance, in his famous interview with Butler, shows he had no kinship with Anglo-Catholics! Obedience to bishops, however, does not seem to have been the most characteristic feature either of the Evangelical or the Anglo-Catholic Revivals!

To sum up, then, we find that, as compared with Anglo-Catholics, Wesley was strongly Protestant. Indeed, in his conception of the ministry he was almost Presbyterian, with the difference that he believed in episcopacy as an ecclesiastical method, but denied it as a Christian doctrine. On the other hand, between his sacramental practices and those of the Anglo-Catholics there is more likeness than his followers have cared to admit. Anglo-Catholicism, in fact, has emphasized what was a vital factor in the Evangelical Revival, although it only represented one side of Wesley's Witness; and Anglo-Catholicism owes its origin in part to the neglect of the sacraments in Evangelical circles after Wesley's death. Would it have developed if Wesley's

followers had held fast to his sacramental practices? Over-emphasis has unfortunately, though not unnaturally, led to dangerous extravagances, but the fact remains that the sacramental devotion of Anglo-Catholicism, apart from its Roman exaggerations, is genuinely Wesleyan.

## XVII

## WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

METHODISM, at her present stage of evolution, in a rapidly changing world has many problems to solve which she cannot afford to ignore. The future is inscrutable, nor is it the object of this chapter to indulge in easy but idle prophecies about it. It does not, however, seem unprofitable to point out certain lessons which the past affords to guide her policy in the present and her expectations for the future.

*The Living Past* is the telling title of an excellent book of English history. The Evangelical Revival is a past event which lives, not only in modern Methodism, but in the Salvation Army and Anglo-Catholicism, and to some extent in all Anglo-Saxon Protestant Churches. We often find the ghost of John Wesley in unexpected quarters. In some senses the influence of the Revival will endure through the influences begotten by it. It is not likely to die, in any case, so long as Charles Wesley's hymns are sung. An organization of forty million souls scattered throughout the world ought, one would think, to be able to face the future with confidence. But numbers and organizations, particularly in religion, can be very misleading. If one becomes a thousand, a thousand can soon become a unit. Voluntary systems like Methodism will not continue to live unless they prove and re-prove themselves to be of religious value to mankind. Their social and political service may give them a fictitious longevity, but that sort of service soon languishes if the religion that it issued from is devitalized. Nothing but a response to man's religious

needs can keep a Church alive. The problem for the Methodism of the future is the possession and validity of its religious experience, how it is to be expressed by evangelism on the one hand, and by symbols and devotional life on the other.

As one examines the Protestantism of to-day, with its conflicting voices, and notes the over-stress put on particular aspects of truth and duty by different religious organizations —new ones like Christian Science, for instance—or marks, paradoxical as it sounds, the sheer sectarianism of the Anglo-Catholics, one cannot but call to mind the admirable balance of John Wesley and his broad-minded Catholicity.

Wesley did not regard himself as the founder of a denomination, but of a Society which stood for certain things neglected in the Church. But behind the Society stood the Church of England. His Society itself had within itself the salient characteristics of the Church. It was *ecclesiola in ecclesia*. Wesley always preserved the balance of the outward and the inward in religion ; of the evangelical and the devotional ; of the organization for the present age and the organization for all time ; of personal experience and collective experience ; and he feared the forces which might upset that balance. The American Methodist Episcopal Church was created under the compulsion of political necessities, and differed from English Methodism, but Wesley strove to give that Church all that was best of the organized life and order of the Catholic Church.

In some ways no doubt his ideals, on account of historical causes he could not prevent, failed to prevail after his death, and his organized Societies became sectarian, and perhaps could only have continued to exist by developing their distinctive denominational values. It would be idle to deny that the Catholicity of Methodism dwindled in the earlier nineteenth century, but, even so, Wesley's Society had been so wisely organized that the outward and the inward life were well balanced, although the outward life

expressed itself in the devotional institutions of Wesley's devising much more than by the Catholic customs, and the evangelical doctrines of conversion were preached in such a sectarian way as often to make Methodism a difficult home for the children of Methodist families. The struggle of Methodism to remain a mere Society after her detachment from the Church of England, when she had no longer association with a Church of which she could legitimately be called a Society, lingered on till our own days. It was one hundred years after the death of Wesley before his Society called itself a Church. The Methodism of the future will be only effective in proportion as she makes good her claim to be the Church of God.

Can a sect, a denomination, a corporate emphasis be a permanent Christian organization? History so far has said no, and in the judgement of the present writer that is what history will continue to say. A religious denomination has a temporary value which tends to exhaust itself, and its permanent value must depend on whether or no, in its own religious consciousness and through its experience and expression, it is or is not the Church of Christ. The Church may have the colour of the locality in which it works, the stamp of nationality, and even the impress of the century of its primary activity, but one of the notes of the Church is Catholicity, and a great organization like Methodism cannot rest content with being the home of a type; it must ultimately be universal or perish.

Methodism seems to be standing at the cross-ways. Much of her distinctive denominational life has gone, and she is feeling, perhaps subconsciously, after Catholicity. Her world-wide character and diffusion suggest that of all religious institutions she challenges most the claim of Roman Catholicism. May it not be that the future will have to declare which is the Catholic Church, the Roman or the Methodist organization. Which really has the truest notes of universality?

Methodism is not likely to live long on a purely denomination basis. Her characteristic devotions have nearly all perished. Her characteristic governmental machinery, it is true, is less changed, but that belongs to the mechanics and not the dynamics of the denomination, and is of quite secondary importance. Methodism has lived, and can only live, as a denomination through her typical devotions and evangelism. Her distinctive experience remains, but even her experience is not so exclusively of one type as it was, and the best means of preserving the buoyant evangelical experience—the class meeting—has perished in many Methodist denominations. Whether Methodism be viewed from the denominational or the Catholic standpoint, the loss of the class meeting must be regarded as her chief loss. Acute observers like Dr. R. W. Dale and le Père Piette and many others have regarded this characteristic institution with admiration; that is an evidence of its Catholic as well as its denominational value. If the creative experience of Methodism is to be preserved, an experience which was not merely eighteenth century, but apostolic in its force and significance, the class meeting or some substitute must be found for its preservation.

Societies cannot live without symbols, as Dr. Ryder Smith showed in his Fernley Lecture of 1927. The symbols may conceivably change. Methodism, for instance, might invent new symbols every generation, but, even so, it would be difficult to identify one historical period of the Society with another unless there was something common to all stages in its symbols. The likelihood of a Society persisting long with perpetually changing symbols is small. But Methodism, as she sheds the symbolic devotions of one age, is not creating, or at least is only to a negligible extent creating, new denominational devotions. Her present tendency is to emphasize devotions in common with other Churches rather than devotions which distinguish her from

other Churches. All this shows that her distinctively denominational mission is weakening as time goes on.

But is Methodism in any true sense the Catholic Church? Has she in herself a consciousness of universality of appeal which justifies her claim to be a world-wide Church? Is the world her parish? or is she content merely to appeal to types and sections of the community? Is she to remain perpetually sectarian and denominational, even though her distinctively denominational symbols are names rather than realities? How is she to make good her claim to be the Church of Christ? This is her future problem.

There seem to be two possible routes by which Methodism may attain to genuine Catholicity. The first is by union with other Christian communities. Such union was adumbrated by the last Lambeth Conference, and is being worked for interdenominationally by Conferences on Faith and Order, particularly in America.[1]

The practical difficulties of organic unification are very considerable. A great experiment in Canada has resulted in the existence of two Churches; one numerically large, and the other comparatively small, instead of two of a size less than one and greater than the other. Attempts at organic union tend to end in new schisms. Furthermore, such unions risk dangerous compromises for the sake of unification, and tend to be on the basis of the lowest common denominator. A combination of existing religious organizations as societies in one Church, with some common super-organization and government, is an ideal difficult to realize.

That this may be the way to Catholicity, the writer would be the last to deny, although he would always look with suspicion at external unifications, and question carefully whether or not they corresponded with internal unity.

[1] Questions like British Methodist union are irrelevant to the argument. Whether such union be desirable or undesirable, it is, after all, the union of three Churches with common experience, devotions, and evangelism, only separated by secondary questions of polity. This chapter regards the three Methodist Churches, whether organically separated or united, as a unit.

Diversity of opinion in the same Church is desirable and necessary if the note of universality is to be struck, but there are limits to diversity. It is idle to talk of the unity of people who contradict each other on fundamental matters of faith and order. Truth must come first and union second. Organic union is easiest to achieve when people ardently 'hang theology'—but the practical organizer can never long restrain the sheer individualism of the thinker, and of vivid religious experience. It is admitted, however, that the exhaustion of the primitive sectarian values of the modern denominations may lead to the outward unification, first, of Protestantism and, secondly, of the whole Church of Christ.

But there is a second way in which Methodism may realize her universality. She may develop and express her inherent Catholicity; that she has such a Catholicity to express is evident from a study of her origins. John Wesley was a great Catholic; he was neither tainted by Roman sectarianism nor by Methodist sectarianism. He constantly appeals in his works to the practices and doctrines of the Church of early Christianity. He honoured the traditions and customs of the Church, which conserved and expressed the collective experience of centuries. No one had a more vivid personal experience than he, but he was no individualist in religion. He realized that collective experience was as truly experience as individual. It was his great work to form a religious society, which he regarded as a society of Church people, although he would shut the door on none who wanted to enter it. In this he was more Catholic, and not less, than the Church of his day. He reiterated his own claims to be a churchman to the end of his life. He thought that the extemporaneous services of his own Society were defective, and therefore emphasized the desirability of more comprehensive liturgical worship. He once said to his preachers that 'our public worship was not such as supersedes the Church service; it pre supposes public prayer, like the sermon at the University.

If it were designed to be instead of the Church service, it would be essentially defective.'[1]

He regarded outward religion and social religion as integral parts of Christianity. His sacramentalism was fervent and convinced. He was content that his Society should be defective in certain ways, because the Church of England was in the background of his Society. He claimed that his people were members of that Church. He left no instructions as to how children were to be brought into Church fellowship. Lack of instruction on this matter is unaccountable, for Wesley makes no reference whatever, so far as I can learn, to Anglican confirmation. The Society itself, though he made it no substitute for the Church, he organized with a due regard to the balance of outward and inward religion. One could sometimes wish that Wesley had left behind him careful rules for the Society in case of its separation from the Church, but that would have seemed to assume what he would never admit was necessary.

After all, the separation from a national Church made Methodism international. She had to pass through a sectarian stage or she never could have found her feet. But now it is essential that she assert not only the distinctive characteristics of a Society, but all the Catholic life which lay behind the Society. American Methodism has done this, for historical reasons, more boldly than English. In some ways English Methodism is still ambiguous in her teaching and practice. Nothing is more essential, for instance than the confirmation, or some equivalent, of her baptized children. Her sacramental practice has been too much shaped by the repressions of the early nineteenth century. The development of the devotions of the Universal Church is needed if Methodism is to express the Catholicity which her widespread organizations demand.

Methodism arose in the eighteenth century, and the eighteenth-century character of her organization has been

[1] *W. W.* VIII. 209.

invaluable. But if she is to be Catholic, she must be careful to retain from the eighteenth century nothing but what is of value in all the centuries. The revival that created Methodism was apostolic and not eighteenth century. Its experience of God in Christ was one with that of the first century. It cannot be thought of in local and temporal terms. Dull Churches had receded from the apostolic age because they failed in apostolic experience. The Wesleys in their own age were the true successors of the apostles. The Methodist experience is universal experience, and was the chief cause of the proclamation of Christianity in modern times as a universal message of redemption. The symbols and devotion which expressed and distributed that experience, like similar devotions in early centuries, were partially of temporary and partially of permanent value. But Methodism is not sectarian but Catholic when she uses the class meeting (or equivalents of it) to express fellowship and mediate evangelical experience. No Church has real value unless it has a witness to give which can only be made vital by experience.

Methodism has the marks of the Catholic Church. She has produced saints, and still produces them. Her ministry is as apostolic as any has ever been, if judged by its fruits, the only genuine test of an apostolic ministry. She has the sacramental life of the historic Church, though, on the whole, since her first days she has somewhat neglected it, largely because she found for a period sufficient nourishment in her denominational symbolic devotions. She has a message for all men. She inherited, cherishes, and proclaims a vital evangelical experience. She holds to the faith once delivered to the saints. She believes in outward as well as in inward religion, in social as well as in individual Christianity. She is working in every part of the world—in English-speaking countries with conspicuous success, and among pagan people winning many victories for Jesus Christ.

She is the most widely representative body of Protestants,

and her claims of Catholicity, though little more than whispered in the past, will become more vocal in the future.

Methodism has many difficulties to face in the immediate future. Her perils are the perils of success. Her wealth may be her ruin, as John Wesley foresaw. If her standards of valuation become statistical, whether by the measurement of men or dollars, her doom is sealed. 'The things that are seen are temporal, the things that are not seen are eternal.'

All Institutional Religion is subject to grave criticism to-day, and the twin forces of pietism and scepticism may wage again in another form the battles of the eighteenth century. Arianism and 'stillness' were the enemies conquered by Wesley, and the offspring of like humanistic and pietistic theories in our day may have to be fought against and defeated once more.

The new psychology may prove a great enemy to Methodism. When spiritual phenomena are accepted on naturalistic grounds, the supernatural tends to be explained away, and the Church is, after all, supernatural or nothing.

Methodism may have to contend too with new forms of social enthusiasm and organization, but she has a great inheritance of social experience and social service, which will stand her in good stead in hours of conflict.

What is essential to the Methodism of the future is primarily the retention of her evangelical experience, which will always drive her to missionary effort. If she is to prevail, she must realize her Catholic obligation without losing her denominational heritage. She must see that Christianity is both inward and outward, individual and social. The more she understands her own wonderful history, the more will she be able to challenge the world in the name of her Master, Jesus Christ. What will her future be? If she fails, will the Roman Church win? What is to be the Catholic Church of the future? Can Epworth compete with Rome?

# Part V

# THE SECULAR INFLUENCE OF THE WESLEYS

'It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the scene in Aldersgate Street forms an epoch in English History.'

—W. E. H. Lecky.

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## XVIII

## WESLEY AND ENGLISH HISTORY

In so far as A.D. 1738 was considered by contemporaries to have any particular historical importance, their thoughts seem to have turned exclusively to the event popularly known as the affair of 'Jenkins's ear.' Nor can it be denied that the alleged mutilation of Captain Jenkins by some Spanish sailors who had captured him, however trivial it may seem, did affect the course of English history; for the popular clamour that arose from the general belief in the perpetration of this barbarity brought the wise peace policy of Sir Robert Walpole to an end and inaugurated a fruitless maritime war with Spain, though it is at least doubtful whether Spanish sailors were responsible for the loss of Jenkins's ear, or whether he lost it at all.[1]

But the impartial observer, far removed in time from the actual events, can see clearly that in ultimate results the affair of Captain Jenkins cannot be compared with the conversion of John Wesley. Since it is practically impossible for men to estimate truly the relative importance of events of which they are witnesses, few, or perhaps no, contemporaries realized that May 24, 1738, when Wesley's heart was 'strangely warmed,' was a red-letter day in English history. John Wesley himself certainly did not appreciate the full significance of that memorable hour. Nevertheless, though they are only dimly apprehended even yet, the effects which it was to have, not only on religious life, but also on secular history, were of immeasurable importance. Halévy regards the Evangelical Revival and its results as the chief reason for

[1] See Lecky, *History*, Vol. I., p. 45 *n*.

the stability of England in the nineteenth century. 'The Evangelical Revival,' he says, 'was the last Protestant movement which gave birth to permanent institutions.'

Halévy's view in some ways only strengthens and confirms that expressed by earlier historians—Green and Lecky, for example. But his more elaborate analysis of the political and social values of Methodism has called attention to the fact that the Evangelical Revival had a much wider influence than has been supposed; that it profoundly affected other spheres as well as politics. Mr. and Mrs. Hammond qualify their somewhat tepid admiration of the Evangelical Revival with strictures on its narrowness and individualism. In speaking of the tame character of the eighteenth century, they write:

'To pass from the eighteenth century to the Revolt, from Pope to Blake, or from Sheridan to Shelley, is to burst from the little hothouse of sheltered and nurtured elegance into an infinite wild garden of romance and mystery. For the eighteenth century such escape was impossible, and, if any fell into the fatal crime of enthusiasm, his frenzy took the form of Methodism, which was a more limited world than the world he had quitted.'[1] But it is interesting to compare the judgement of Dr. Dover Wilson, a recent writer on the literature of the period, who has read and realized the importance of Halévy's book. 'The Augustan age, like the Victorian, possessed a certain style and self-complacency of its own. It boasted of its urbanity, of its social stability, of its reasonableness, of its self-restraint—in a word, as the romantic critic would phrase it, of its chains. The first hand to open the window by which fresh air might be let into this somewhat stuffy atmosphere was that of John Wesley, who, beginning his mission in 1739, had by the end of the century so enormously influenced the whole character of the English people that a well-informed foreign observer of the English people (E. Halévy) regards

[1] *Village Labourer*, p. 302.

Methodism as the dominant moulding force of nineteenth-century England. The Augustan deprecated excitement and disliked enthusiasm; Wesleyanism encouraged both, and made of them its most powerful instruments. The Romantic Revival, therefore, coincided with a great religious awakening, and the early poets of the movement worked under its direct influence.'[1]

To the Hammonds it seemed that Methodism was the asylum of the enthusiastic in an age of tranquillity, but narrow in itself and outside the main stream of development. Dr. Dover Wilson regards it rather as a bridge connecting the Augustan with the Victorian—Pope with Blake and Sheridan with Shelley. Perhaps we might say that it broke down the fence between the cultivated garden and the tropical forest. It is noteworthy that, although it may be a novelty to derive the Romantic School of Poetry from the Evangelical Revival, the same descent has already been claimed for Ruskin and Carlyle. 'One has only to glance at the pages of Ruskin and Carlyle . . . to see where they drew their deeper inspirations, and whose spiritual children they really were. The very phrases of the evangelical leader were continually on their lips, and the deep and religious spirit pervading their social hopes and philanthropic dreams was born of the great Second Reformation which began with Wesley.'[2]

The truth is that, when the Evangelical Revival vitalized the souls of many thousands of people, it revitalized England. May 24, 1738, was the birthday of a new Renaissance, whose final results will be as great, if they are not so already, as those of any of the great spiritual movements in the history of Christendom.

Many people realized long since that the Evangelical Revival resulted in great benefits to humanity, such as the abolition of slavery, and historians like Green and Lecky saw

[1] Dover Wilson, Introduction to *Poetry of the Age of Wordsworth*.
[2] *Christ and Civilization*, 403. Professor T. C. Hill, quoted in Bready's *Shaftesbury*.

that its sobering effect on character may have stemmed tides of revolution such as those which broke out in France. But no one has tracked out the historical and psychological effects of the Revival with such precise and convincing carefulness as M. Elie Halévy ; and, indeed, no one before him realized the depth of the influence of the Wesleys on the life of England.

Halévy has published three volumes of his *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, dealing so far with the years 1815–41. His first volume surveys and analyses the political, judicial, economic, legislative, and popular life of England at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and discovers chaos and anarchy in every direction. Notwithstanding this, the Victorian age was one of unexampled stability and prosperity. What was the secret of the amazing success of Victorian England ? It remains a puzzle, Halévy tells us, to foreign observers. He finds the solution in John Wesley and the Evangelical Revival, and in what issued from that spiritual quickening of the English people.

Halévy's discriminating analysis of the above-named aspects of English life at the beginning of the nineteenth century is much too detailed for more than passing reference, but it presents a gloomy picture of our country after the Napoleonic Wars. Financial crises were quite common ; the monarchy was unpopular ; politicians mediocre or worse ; the powers of the judiciary confused ; the police force inadequate ; the military and naval forces undependable ; the cultivation of the land thriftless, and wages much too low.[1] The new industrial revolution had created unforeseen conditions, for which no preparation had been made. Sismondi, who visited England in 1817, concluded that ' unless Governments could succeed in returning to systems of slow production and limited consumption, society would pass inevitably through crisis after crisis to the final upheaval in which a mob of angry workers would put an

[1] See Halévy I. 1–334.

end to civilization.'[1] Karl Marx came to similar conclusions, and was glad, because he thought 'the industrial revolution was the prelude of a social revolution which would abolish the State and transform the conscience of the human race.'[2]

Halévy's general summary of the situation he has analysed so carefully is contained in the following striking words[3]:

'If the materialistic interpretation of history is to be trusted, if economic facts explain the course taken by the human race in its progress, the England of the nineteenth century was surely, above all other countries, destined to revolution, both political and religious. But it was not to be so. In no other country of Europe have social changes been accomplished with such a marked and gradual continuity. The source of such continuity and comparative stability is, as we have seen, not to be found in the economic organization of the country. We have seen also that it cannot be found in the political institutions of England, which were essentially unstable and wanting in order. *To find it we must pass on to another category of social phenomena —to beliefs, emotions, and opinions, as well as to the institutions and sects in which these beliefs, emotions, and opinions take a form suitable for scientific inquiry.*'[4]

Now when Halévy turns to the question of beliefs, his first words are: 'It was in 1739 that John Wesley and George Whitefield began to preach Methodism.'[5] The period was one of revolt and discontentment. 'In 1739 the revolt assumed a different form. The discontented workmen flocked to the sermons of three clergymen and their disciples. The popular ferment took the shape of an outburst of enthusiastic Christianity.'[6] The revival spread, and not only touched the masses of the people out of which the new Methodist Societies were recruited, but profoundly influenced, as we showed in Chapter XIV., the Church of England and the Nonconformist sects. Halévy lays special

[1] See Halévy I. 334.
[2] Ibid. I. 334.
[3] Ibid. I. 334–5.
[4] Italics mine.
[5] Ibid. I. 341.
[6] Ibid. I. 341.

stress on the influence of Methodism on the older denominations. He analyses their operations, and arrives at the same conclusion as to their lifeless condition as all other candid and unprejudiced observers. The quickening of the Church of England, he claims, was slow, but the evangelical party grew in influence during the early nineteenth century. He has little difficulty in showing how Methodism saved Nonconformity from the sterilizing influence of rationalism and politics. The evangelized Baptists and Congregationalists became the one prevalent force among the Dissenters. The Rationalistic Nonconformists were political and often revolutionary, but they were largely driven out of their chapels by the evangelical flood, and, while the Dissenters still remained political in a sense in which the Wesleyans were not, they put a new emphasis on personal religion. 'We can watch between 1793 and 1815 an uninterrupted decline of the revolutionary spirit among the sects.'[1] Their political past history no doubt continued to influence them, and caused a good deal of corporate cleavage between them and the Methodists, but Halévy quite truly says, 'The Wesleyan preaching had regenerated Nonconformity, creating new sects, and transforming both the spirit and the organizations of the old denominations.'[2]

From a public point of view the importance of this influence was due to the social status of the Nonconformists of the time. 'Nonconformity was particularly the religion of the lower middle class.'[3] Methodism, of course, appealed not only to those classes, but to the masses of the people, and the consequences of this permeation of the people with evangelical life, according to Halévy, have been momentous.

'Why was it,' he asks, 'that, of all the countries of Europe, England has been the most free from revolutions, violent crises, and sudden changes? We have sought in vain to find the explanation by an analysis of her political institutions

[1] Halévy I. 359. [2] Ibid. I. 370. [3] Ibid. I. 371.

and economic organizations. Her political institutions were such that society might easily have lapsed into anarchy had there existed in England a *bourgeoisie* animated by the spirit of revolution. And a system of economic production that was, in fact, totally without organization of any kind would have plunged the country into violent revolution had the working classes found leaders in the middle class to provide it with a definite ideal, a creed, a practical programme. But the *élite* of the working class, the hard-working and capable *bourgeois*, had been imbued by the evangelical movement with a spirit from which the established order had nothing to fear.'[1]

The leaders of English Labour movements are blamed on the Continent for their middle-class morality and praised for their organizing power. The English passion for liberty is combined with a reverence for order. These virtues are rarely blended in the continental working classes. Both qualities arise, according to Halévy, from a common origin. 'The majority of the leaders of the great trade union movement that would arise in England within a few years of 1815 will belong to Nonconformist sects. They will often be local preachers. Their spiritual ancestors were the founders of Methodism. In the vast work of social organization, which is one of the dominant characteristics of nineteenth-century England, it would be difficult to over-estimate the part played by the Wesleyan Revival.'[2]

A further influence of Methodism which Halévy notes was the Evangelical Movement in the Church of England. The social value of this movement is obvious. Wilberforce, the Clapham Sect, Hannah More, and afterwards Shaftesbury, to say nothing of his coadjutors, Michael Sadler and Richard Oastler, were the direct products of the Evangelical Revival. They were, in the early nineteenth century, the social conscience of England. Their influence on the social regeneration of the country was far deeper and more effective

[1] Halévy I. 371. [2] Ibid. I. 372.

than that of radicals like Cobbett and doctrinaires like Bentham and Mill, although the confluence of Radicalism and Methodism, at such times as it took place, was wonderfully effective in social legislation. Halévy quotes Bentham, rationalist as he was, as saying, 'If to be anti-slavite is to be a saint, saintship for me! I am a saint.'[1] 'Saints' was the nickname for evangelical politicians The abolition of slavery was directly due to Methodism. Wilberforce was a spiritual son of John Wesley, whose last letter was a stirring appeal to Wilberforce to pursue his work, and the activity of the later Tory-Methodist group was the chief factor in the passing of much-needed mines and factory legislation.

Not only does Halévy give an account of the general influence of the Evangelical Revival on the social life of the country by means of the reborn Christianity of the Churches, but he tracks out, more particularly in his third volume, the manner in which it moulded working-class organizations, held the balance through Wesleyan Methodism between political and ecclesiastical extremes, provided at once a deep philanthropic motive for social reform, and a political stability which checked movements towards revolution.

A few illustrations of the influence of Methodism which Halévy cites may be interesting. He is greatly impressed with the fact that the organizations of Methodism were the model of the social organizers of the day. A socialist organization of workmen in 1831 is an illustration. '*Class-leaders* were appointed at public meetings of the members in the proportion of one for about every thirty or forty members, the *class-leaders* mostly meeting with their classes weekly at their own homes.'[2] The mass meetings of the Anti-Corn Law League in 1838, Halévy thinks, would be unintelligible apart from Methodism. 'Our perplexity is diminished when we compare the mass meetings of the free traders with these religious meetings which Wesley and Whitefield had first

[1] Halévy I. 521 [2] Ibid. II. 45 n.

introduced a century before, and which had been conducted ever since by generations of itinerant preachers, nurtured in their traditions.' Methodism had devised an elaborate system by which to excite and at the same time to direct the emotions of the crowd, and every Englishman since Wesley's time who had organized a campaign of propaganda had copied intentionally or unintentionally the Wesleyan model.[1] Free trade was made into a sort of religion.[2] But it is interesting to know that, though Bunting, 'the Sovereign Pontiff of the Sect,'[3] declared himself against the Corn Laws, Wesleyan ministers obeyed their Church and abstained from all political agitation when 650 clergy of all denominations supported this 'new religion.'[4]

The refusal of the Wesleyan Methodist Society to have anything to do with politics was a new and important step for a Church to take. It was not taken by the new Methodist denominations, which were either democratic in origin or sprang from a new evangelization of the poor in rural areas, as did the Primitive Methodists, who were particularly conscious of the oppressions of the poor. But the main stream of Methodism was anti-political. It made distinctions, no doubt, on matters that were really great moral issues, like slavery, or even in the interests of its own preachers, when the position of an itinerant preacher was so ill-defined that he could be arrested as a vagabond and become the victim of the press-gang. But it would have no corporate dealings with politics as such, or with labour organizations. Its attitude was consistently Conservative. Wesleyans were often opposed to Radicals, not because of their politics, in which they took comparatively little interest, but because of their irreligion. The Methodists, because of their other-worldly pietism, were very unpopular with men like Cobbett, and with the Dissenters, but even this had valuable social results. In more than one political contest they became a mediating force.

[1] Halévy III. 340. [2] Ibid. III. 342. [3] Ibid. III. 342. [4] Ibid. III. 342.

It may be that they saved the Church of England from Disestablishment in 1832. Disestablishment was forced by the Nonconformists of the day into the forefront of their Radical Parliamentary programme.[1] The Wesleyans suspended a minister, Joseph Raynor Stephens, for accepting the position of secretary of a Church Separation Society, because he had offended against 'the peaceable and anti-sectarian spirit of Wesleyanism.' Their attitude no doubt weakened the attack on the Church of England. They were equally Conservative in relation to Trade Unions. The Conference forbade Wesleyans to become members of the Trade Unions or (to quote from the Conference address 1833) 'associations which are subversive of the principles of true and proper liberty, employing unlawful oaths and threats and force to acquire new members and to accomplish purposes which tend to destroy the very framework of civil society.'[2] We need not wonder that Cobbett hated the Methodists. The best national organization in the country, according to Halévy, consolidating hundreds of thousands of the *bourgeoisie* and workers into Conservative resistance to revolutionary measures, could hardly escape criticism. Might it not be claimed, as we shall see in the next chapter, the Hammonds suggest, that Methodism was positively harmful to the cause of progress? What Halévy claims, of course, is that it gave stability to British society in a time of danger.

But the Conservatism of corporate Wesleyan Methodism was not the only influence of the Evangelical Revival in the nineteenth century. The greatest social Reformers of the times were Tory Methodists, and to examine the work of Shaftesbury, Sadler, Oastler, and Raynor Stephens is to follow the course of a vitalizing stream. But we shall return to them later. An examination of the situation from other points of view may help us to see how Methodism—

[1] Halévy III. 154.
[2] Address of Conference, 1835 (*Minutes*, Vol. VII., pp. 305–6).

Conservative in the Wesleyan Conference, Radical and anti-Church in Primitive Methodism, Evangelical and Tory in certain influential publicists—was really, partially on account of these glaring logical divisions, not only a stabilizing but a regenerating force in the social life of England.

## XIX

## SAINTS OR CITIZENS?

'THE Methodist Movement was a call not for citizens but for saints.'[1] These words are a summary in a simple sentence of the criticism of Mr. and Mrs. Hammond on the social activities of Methodism in the early nineteenth century. The statement, no doubt, is true, if it means that the citizenship of the Methodist was primarily 'in heaven,' but the implication of the statement, that Methodism tended little towards citizenship, is grotesquely mistaken, as Halévy's unprejudiced study of the social conditions of the nineteenth century clearly shows. It was just because the Methodists put sanctity first that their contribution towards citizenship was so valuable. Saints and citizens are not mutually exclusive. The object of the following chapters is to show in what ways the evangelical religion produced citizenship of a better quality than any mere cult of citizenship produces.

The works of Mr. and Mrs. Hammond on the industrial revival, their *Town Labourer* and *Village Labourer* and their charming *Life of Lord Shaftesbury*, are probably the best studies of the social life of the period. Their quick sense of the wrongs of the poor and their enthusiasm for ameliorative work are not less notable than the accuracy of the histories they have written. They realize also that the evangelical religion was the inspiration of Lord Shaftesbury, although they often treat the extravagances of his devotion with good-natured raillery. And they actually call the evangelical education of his childhood a misfortune.[2] J. W. Bready in

[1] *Town Labourer*, p. 282. [2] Hammond's *Shaftesbury*, p. 3.

his *Life of Shaftesbury the Evangelical* is justified in his criticisms of the Hammonds' rather ironical treatment of Shaftesbury's religion. If it had not been for his evangelicalism, could he have done his work? One cannot help feeling that the Hammonds have failed to measure the full force of the Evangelical Revival as a social factor in the betterment of England. Their almost eighteenth-century dislike of religious 'enthusiasm' seems to prejudice some of their judgements. Their treatment of the reaction of the Wesleyan Movement on the social and political development of England at first sight seems convincing, and no doubt it contains considerable elements of truth. But it is unsatisfactory because it does not sufficiently realize that the Evangelical Revival was a watershed from which many streams other than the Wesleyan denomination issued, and that the activities of that denomination in the early nineteenth century can by no means be identified with the resolutions of that purely clerical and unrepresentative body, the Wesleyan Conference.

The Hammonds represent a feeling amongst many social thinkers of our day who emphasize the indifference of the Church of the eighteenth century to the growth of inhuman conditions in the early stages of the Industrial revolution. The beginnings of the Evangelical Revival and the Industrial Revolution were contemporaneous. But what would have happened if Wesley had been a political and social reformer instead of an evangelist, or if he had been both? If he had combined the two rôles in the eighteenth century, he would have probably failed in both of them. And to have substituted the first for the second would have been futile, because he would have lacked the dynamic which made him potent.

Is it irreverent to compare the servant with his master? If our Lord had been a 'social reformer,' spending his days, for instance, in denouncing slavery, he might have been remembered as a minor prophet. Was not the work of

giving 'life'—and 'life abundant'—of infinitely more value in the long run even to slaves? John Wesley was following in His footsteps at however great a distance.

R. H. Tawney puts the case for the Church more moderately when he writes that 'there was not any relapse into abnormal inhumanity'[1] on the part of the eighteenth-century Church. 'The very idea that the Church possessed an independent standard of values, to which social institutions were amenable, had been abandoned . . . the spiritual blindness which made possible the general acquiescence in the horrors of the early factory system was not a novelty, but the habit of a century.'[2] But Wesley retained the Christian valuation of wealth, as Tawney in his too slight reference to Wesley's views admits—'protests like Wesley's sermon on the use of money merely heighten the impression of a general acquiescence in the conventional ethics.'[3]

*The Town Labourer* is the book of the Hammonds in which they allege and illustrate certain results of the Evangelical Revival, which are unsatisfactory from the point of view of the social reformer. The social condition of England at the beginning of the nineteenth century was such that no decent Englishman to-day can read of it without shame. The revelations of the Factories and Mines Commissions[4] of the barbarity, cruelty, and heartlessness of the industrial world are as revolting as those of negro slavery. The long hours of work, the degrading employments of women, the murderous treatment of little children, the insanitary conditions of employment, the wretched wages, and the high prices of food combined to create conditions of life which the victims were well justified in resisting. The Combination Laws to prevent self help and mutual efforts on the part of workmen to liberate themselves from the grip of Moloch and Mammon must have been intolerable to the workers of the day—and the people who were hanged or

[1] Tawney: *Rise of Capitalism*, p. 193.
[2] Ibid., p. 193.
[3] Ibid., p. 191.
[4] See Chapter XXI.

deported both in town and country for disobeying such tyrannical laws ought to be reverenced as martyrs as truly as Ridley, Cranmer, and Latimer. Illustrations of these conditions of life, unthinkable to a modern Englishman, abound in the pages of the Hammonds, and in the reports of the Factories and Mines Commissions. No one questions the reasonableness of inquiry as to what part the Methodists and evangelicals took in alleviating these conditions. They were the most fervid Christians of the times, and their Master had made treatment of the weak the standard of the Judgement Day. ' Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me.'

On the whole, although with qualifications more significant than they seem to think, the Hammonds pronounce an adverse verdict. They begin with two prominent evangelicals, Wilberforce and Hannah More, and have no difficulty in showing that the conservatism of these evangelical philanthropists caused them, particularly Wilberforce, to stand on the side of the oppressor.

The Hammonds think that the political views of Wilberforce were due to his evangelical religion. ' Wilberforce, who devoted his life and gifts to a humane cause, is the best representative of this religion, and a study of his speeches and writings shows that the tendency to regard Christianity in politics as only one of the sanctions of the existing order was no accident, but an essential part of its spirit. He was, as we have seen, largely responsible for the degradation of industrial life due to the savage measures taken by the upper classes to prevent working men from protecting their standard of living by defensive organization. . . . It is particularly interesting to turn to the pages of his *Practical Views of the System of Christianity*, a work that attained an immense popularity. There he explains that Christianity makes the inequalities of the social scale less galling to the lower orders ; that it teaches them to be diligent, humble, patient ; that it reminds them " that their more lowly path

has been allotted to them by the hand of God ; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences ; that the present state of things is very short ; that the objects about which worldly men conflict so eagerly are not worth the contest ; that the peace of mind, which Religion offers indiscriminately to all ranks, affords much truer satisfaction than all the expensive pleasures which are beyond the poor man's reach ; that in their view the poor have the advantage ; that if their superiors enjoy more abundant comforts, they are also exposed to many temptations from which the inferior classes are happily exempted ; that having food and raiment, they should be "therewith content," since their situation in life, with all its evils, is better than they have deserved at the hands of God ; and, finally, that all human distinctions will soon be done away, and the true followers of Christ will all, as children of the same Father, be alike admitted to the possession of the same heavenly inheritance. Such are the blessed effects of Christianity on the temporal well-being of political communities.'[1]

No one would deny an unpleasant note of smugness in this extract. But one or two things ought to be considered. The main argument that the interior life of experimental Christianity is superior to conditions, particularly in the context of the times, is admirable and true, whatever be thought of some of the deductions made from it. And then the French Revolution had frightened England, and great convulsions of society like the French and Russian Revolutions cause most sensible people to wonder whether it is the best thing even for the unfortunate to create a chaos in which misfortune and ruin are likely to be more widely spread. Halévy and most sober historians seem to think England was fortunate in escaping revolution. If there had been no force such as Methodism to check the wilder spirits of the time, would England have escaped ? Halévy

[1] *The Town Labourer*, p. 245.

thinks not. Would the Hammonds say an English revolution in the early nineteenth century would have been an advantage even to the labouring classes?

A third thing to be remembered in judging Wilberforce is that men who are great reformers are rarely men of nicely balanced minds. The nicely balanced mind is usually possessed by people who belong to the great cloud of witnesses, not to those who are the chief actors of the world. Wilberforce had one work to do, and he did it. So intense was his feeling about the abolition of negro slavery that it would inevitably make him regard other social reforms as of secondary importance. The very intensity of a practical man's vision in one direction blinds him in another. For this reason alone, his views on English conditions should not be taken too seriously. Moreover, even the Hammonds admit that Wilberforce supported attempts to reform the game laws, and he cared about the cause of factory children; and the great work Wilberforce did, the abolition of slavery, was the *direct result of the Evangelical Revival.*

But the Hammonds do not base their verdict on the views of one man, but find other illustrations of the same inhuman attitude in the Methodism of the time. It is only fair to say that they allow both that Shaftesbury gained his inspiration of social reform from his evangelical religion, and that the belief in the equality of human souls and their immortal greatness does inspire some Christians to do everything possible to save men from the consequences of ill treatment and neglect, which may not only mar their life here, but affect it adversely hereafter. But they argue, on the other hand, that many who take the evangelical view of humanity simply look to another life to adjust the inequalities of this, and are content to do nothing. Is it true, one may ask, that Methodists were the persons responsible for the doctrine of '*laissez-faire*'? The Methodists, the Hammonds argue, and quite rightly, were content to make saints rather than citizens. But are they

on the whole right when they deduce from this statement that the Methodist sainthood was incompatible with citizenship? No deduction could be more unsound. Regard of social obligations was an essential factor both of Wesley's teaching and practice. That the Methodist conception of citizenship was often in the early nineteenth century Conservative rather than Radical is no proof of the soundness of the Hammonds' deduction. According to Halévy, the corporate Conservatism of the Wesleyans was their most salutary contribution to the orderly development of British life in the nineteenth century. But it must not for that reason be assumed that Methodists were always Conservatives.

The idea that Methodists were a community of people created by a fear of hell, who lived in a whirl of emotional rapture in anticipation of heaven, is only caricature. No religion was more solidly ethical in its spirit. Love of the neighbour was taught and impressed on the Methodists from the beginning. Their rules of membership, as other pages of this volume attest, were exclusively social and ethical. The Hammonds' summary of Methodist activity and their contrast of Methodism and Trades Unionism is only a clever caricature:

'The spirit of its [Methodism's] teaching was just the opposite of the spirit of the Trade Union movement of the time. It taught patience where the Trade Union taught impatience. The Trade Union taught that men and women should use their powers to destroy the supremacy of wealth in a world made by men; the Methodist, that they should learn resignation amid the painful chaos of a world so made, for good reasons of his own, by God. The Trade Unionists taught that men were not so helpless as they seemed, for combination could give them some control over the conditions of their lives. The Methodist taught that men were not so helpless as they seemed, for religion could make them independent of the conditions of their lives. Further, the Trade Union made loyalty to a class a virtue. The Methodist

movement had just the opposite effect. It preached an intense spiritual individualism. . . . It was a gospel that made a duty of introspection, imposing a self-examination as minute and engrossing as the discipline of the Jesuits.'[1]

There is, of course, truth in the above comparison, as in all caricature, but it is truth out of shape. The contrasts only mark emphases, not facts, and the notion of Methodist individualism as developing minute introspection of the character mentioned is expressed with great exaggeration, quite unintelligible to the writer of this volume, although he is a son of Methodism, with ancestral links with its earliest days. The contrast between the Trade Unionists' loyalty to a class and the Methodists' sheer individualism is misleading ; for, after all, Methodists had a great and solid loyalty for Methodism, which involved important collective obligations.

The further argument[2] that the Methodist's 'love to his neighbour' was largely a desire to convert him, is a perversion of John Wesley's use of that expression. Deductions like the Hammonds', no doubt, can be made from some of the hymns of Charles Wesley, and from some of the pious addresses of the Wesleyan Conference, and even from the conduct of particular Methodists, but a wider knowledge of Methodism, of which some of the Hammonds' qualifications give a faint indication, would have made it impossible to set down their deductions as serious generalizations. The Hammonds do, it is true, qualify their verdict by recording such facts as that 'The Methodists introduced writing lessons into Sunday schools' ; that Methodist Sunday-schools gave scope and training to oratory, leadership, and organization. 'It is mentioned,' they quote, 'that speakers at miners' meetings were Methodists.' The Hammonds go so far as to suggest that even Conservative Methodism had brought so much life and energy into human beings that it made some rebels in spite of itself![3]

[1] *The Town Labourer*, p. 287. [2] Ibid., p. 284. [3] Ibid., p. 287.

It is quite true that in their corporate life the Wesleyans were non-political. They had learnt a bitter lesson from the history of earlier Nonconformity of the dangers of political allegiances, not forgotten even to this day. They did not believe very much in the political nostrums of the hour. The anti-Christianity of the Radical leaders of the times frightened them. They were primarily citizens of heaven, and had discovered in their own peace of soul the secret of living, which, as practical men, they felt was a possession worth more than riches. They were not willing to put external conditions of any sort first in life; they sought first the Kingdom of Heaven—but they also sought its righteousness They had the defects of their qualities, but their primary emphasis on character, rather than on conditions, was the right emphasis, and they were not as indifferent to social conditions as the Hammonds suppose.

The Hammonds base their conclusion too much on the doings of the Wesleyan Conference. They quote its Conservative resolutions and addresses. Its appeals to Methodists to be quiet in times of disturbance, and its general attitude of support of the existing order of society, were no doubt general expressions of the corporate judgements of the denomination, but there are several things to be remembered even before that statement can be accepted without qualification.

The Wesleyan Conference was a purely clerical body, controlled by an oligarchy. After the death of Wesley, when it separated from the Church of England, it had many difficulties to contend with and many conflicts. The more democratic adherents split away from it and formed new Methodist bodies. The Conference, on account of its arbitrary control, was always having trouble, and the spirit of revolt in Methodism became so strong that from 1849 to 1856 at least one hundred thousand people seceded. Democratic views were the inspiration of most of the secessions. Hence it is obvious that too much weight can

be put on the representative value of the declarations of Conference. The seceding Methodists were as truly children of John Wesley as the Wesleyans; and the Primitive Methodists, as their name shows, thought they were nearer to his spirit. No body of people in England have been more conspicuous in their oneness with Labour aspirations and propaganda than the Primitive Methodists. Mr. Sidney Webb, in his book on the Durham Miner, lays special stress on the value of Methodism and especially Primitive Methodism to the cause of Labour in the North of England.

There have been, admittedly, periods when the corporate social conscience of the Wesleyans was far from quick, but they have not been the periods of the dominance of evangelical fervour which the Hammonds seem to assume and dislike. There is little difference in the catalogue of facts that Halévy and the Hammonds collect from Methodist writings, and no doubt it is true to say that Methodism was something of a 'cross current' in the Labour policies of the times. But if not only the Wesleyan Conference, but the whole body of Methodists is taken into account, the Hammonds have insufficient evidence for the statement that the Methodist and the Trades Union flags were in opposition. In the wider use of the word Methodist, as descriptive of the offspring of the Evangelical Revival, it would be found that Methodists flocked to the flag of Trades Unionism without forsaking the flag of Methodism. And the fact that hundreds of thousands of Methodist operatives had found in their own inner life the peace and joy of religion, and the enrichments of redeemed manhood, created a force which while it slackened the movements of wild revolutionaries, strengthened the march of ordered progress.

# XX

## .WESLEY AND SOCIAL SERVICE

JOHN WESLEY—his teaching and practice—is the best answer to those who regard the Evangelical Revival as nothing but an outburst of religious enthusiasm and selfish individualistic pietism. We get to the sources of the Evangelical Revival in Wesley himself. In his teaching, practice, and discipline we find unquestionable concern about the social obligations of Christian men. His emphasis on the duty of love to our neighbour is one of the most startling features of his teaching, and a love that does not act and serve was not what Wesley meant by love. A vital feature of holiness—perfect love, he calls it—is love to the neighbour—that is, social service.

The notion that Wesley merely cared to preach personal salvation from hell is contradicted by his own definition of salvation. The way in which men could walk to union with God, as is shown in Chapter XI. of this volume, was, according to Wesley, not the mystic way, but the social way.

John Wesley was a man of generous culture. His acute observation of mankind was widely extended through many years. He was alive to the many evils of his times. While his chief attention was given to spreading the message of God's love, he showed by his writings that nothing human was alien to him. If any one reads carefully his *Journal*, his sermons, his appeals, and his correspondence, he will find how wide was the range of his human interests. He states his opinion on the questions of population, the increase of great towns,[1]

[1] *W. W.* IV. 69, 82; XI. 136, 137; II. 356.

the depletion of rural districts,[1] unemployment, the causes of unemployment, the remedies for unemployment, the land question, small holdings, agriculture, fisheries, taxation, the National Debt,[2] East India stock,[3] the legitimacy of speculation, the accumulation and the distribution of wealth, luxury,[4] dress,[5] money,[6] intemperance,[7] smuggling,[8] the production of useful and useless articles, the evil of pensions, and kindred themes. He was interested in electricity,[9] medicine,[10] and law,[11] and particularly at such points as they bore on the social life of the poor. His writings abound with allusions to the social conditions of the people, and are not wanting in most drastic suggestions for the removal of wrongs and injustices under which he thought they suffered, and he created the simple social organizations which were the model and framework of the labour organizations of a succeeding age.[12]

Wesley's view of a man's love to his neighbour meant not only that he must give him the best he knew, by trying to open his heart to the heaven of love he had himself experienced, but that he should treat him justly by honest dealing, and by not over-reaching him in business, and doing unto him in every way as he would be done unto by him. This is the essence of the rules of the Methodist Societies. Wesley was deeply concerned about poverty, its causes and remedies, as his tract 'On the Present Scarcity of Provisions' shows. The question is not whether or no the economics of the tract are good, but whether or no Wesley was sensitive to the social obligations of religion. He was grieved at heart one day when he came across a woman who had been glad to make a meal of 'an old bone' which a dog had found. 'And this,' he cries, 'is a land flowing with milk and honey!' After

[1] *W. W.* IV. 69, 82; XI. 136, 137; II. 356.
[2] Ibid. XI. 50–8.
[3] Ibid. XII. 180.
[4] Ibid. III. 258; VIII. 157–8, &c.
[5] Ibid. III. 258; XI. 458, 459, &c.
[6] Ibid. VI. 123, 416, &c.
[7] Ibid. VIII. 301; XI. 495, &c.
[8] Ibid. II. 225, 392, 466; XII. 397.
[9] Ibid. II. 268; XIV. 231–3, &c.
[10] Ibid. XIV. 292–302, &c.
[11] Ibid. IX. 209, 217.
[12] See Halévy I. 242 *n.*

relating like instances of poverty, he answers the question, Why have they nothing to eat? by saying, Because they cannot get work. Why cannot they get work? He answers this question by the recital of a number of facts, such as the price of food. Why is corn so dear? Because huge quantities are used in distilling. Wesley objected to the manufacture of useless products. Why are oats so dear? Because gentlemen keep four times as many horses as formerly. What keeps up the price of poultry, pigs, and eggs? The farming monopoly: 'There is now one great farmer where there were formerly ten or twenty small ones.' Because of the luxury of the rich. Because of the price of land. Because taxes are becoming intolerable.

What are the remedies?

The prices of wheat and barley are to be lowered by the prohibition of distilling; the price of oats is to be lowered by the reduction of the number of gentlemen's horses, by taxing gentlemen's carriages heavily and remitting the wheel tax, which fell heavily on the necessary vehicles of the poor man. The price of pork and poultry is to be reduced by letting no farm at a higher rent than £100 per annum, and generally the price of land and other high prices may be reduced by the repression of luxury. Wesley further argued that half the National Debt should be immediately discharged, and State pensions for people who do nothing to deserve them should be abolished.

Now it is open to any one to say that the suggested remedies are crude and amateurish, but no one must say that the great apostle of evangelicalism was so other-worldly that secular affairs gave him no concern, or that he was without social sympathy. If Wesley had written nothing else, this one tract would be convincing evidence that the spirit of Methodism is not completely understood by Mr. and Mrs. Hammond.

But, in point of fact, he was always concerned about the social conditions of the people. He had a mediaeval dread

of riches. He accumulated a fortune by the sale of books, and left behind him—a teapot ! Tawney spoke of his sermon on riches as a sort of isolated protest in the eighteenth century against the immoral greed of the times. But it was not an isolated protest of Wesley. His warnings against the evils of accumulating personal riches were repeatedly given. ' The treasuring of gold and silver,' he says, ' for its own sake is as grossly unreasonable as the treasuring of spiders or the wings of butterflies.' He feared riches for his people, and not without reason. ' This,' he says, ' will be their grand danger ; as they are industrious and frugal, they must needs increase in goods. . . . What need, then, have they of the strongest warning, lest they be entangled in riches and perish ! ' ' Yes,' the critic might reply, ' he means, " Don't save money, or you may lose your own soul ! " What is that but pure individualism ? ' But that is not the only motive. Commenting on the plain dress of the courtiers of Charles of Sweden, Wesley says :

' If those who wear plain dress do employ the money they thus save, then a part of what only served to fit a few rich tradesmen for hell will suffice to feed and clothe and employ many poor that seek the Kingdom of Heaven. And how will these tradesmen live ? They will live like men, by honest labour ; most of whom before lived like swine, wallowing in all gluttony and sensuality.'[1]

Wesley was evidently interested in the question of the creation and the distribution of wealth.[2]

Wesley's strong opinion about wealth and poverty must not be dismissed as merely the invective of a popular preacher. He organized charity. The Stranger's Friend Society was a loan society which did a lot of good—a substitution for pawnbrokers, whom Wesley would not have in Methodism. He also did his utmost to help without pauperizing the poor. ' " My design," I told them, " is to employ, for the present, all women who are out of business

[1] *W. W.* XI. 454. [2] Ibid. VI. 121.

and desire it in knitting." '[1] He cared to preserve their human dignity, and he was a genuine lover of poor people. At one time he collected a penny a week from each member of his Societies for the relief of the poor and the sick. Methodism was an early 'Friendly Society'—and it discovered the value of the penny.

His tremendous onslaughts on doctors and lawyers and the administrators of public charities all issued from his love of the poor, and his acute sense of social obligation. He had a low opinion of the physicians of the day, and wrote a book of *Primitive Physic* which does greater credit to his heart than his head. As to the law and the lawyers, I will quote one typical instance of his indignation at the wrongs the poor suffered in his time from the bad laws, or the bad administration of the laws, of England:

'Suppose a great man to oppress the needy. What remedy against such oppression can he find in this Christian country? If the one is rich and the other poor, doth not justice stand afar off?' 'Without money you can have no law; poverty alone utterly shuts out justice.'[2]

The best illustration of Wesley's meaning of 'love to the neighbour' is his famous sermon on 'The Use of Money.'[3] It is, no doubt, the utterance of an individualist—Wesley was no Socialist, for he was a man of his time—but a stronger statement of the limitations wherein money can be legitimately accumulated has never been written. No one could possibly read it without realizing that Wesley was against the dehumanizing conditions of labour to which he evidently was quite sensitive during the early years of the Industrial Revolution. The sermon has three heads:

'Gain all you can.
'Save all you can.
'Give all you can.'

[1] *W. J.* II. 454. [2] *W. W.* IX. 209, 217.
[3] Ibid. VI. 117.

They sound like Samuel Smiles. But what matters in a sermon is not the heads, but the body ; and what was the body under the head, ' Gain all you can.' It was that, proper as it is to gain money because of its value under the conditions of modern society as an instrument of social life, it can only be gained by a Christian under strict limitations. These limitations are both individual and social. Money must not be gained at the expense of a man's own bodily, mental, or spiritual health ; a man pays too much for gold if he sacrifices any of these to gain it. Money must not be gained—and this is the important point—at the expense of our *neighbour's body* or our *neighbour's soul.* As to your neighbour's body—' we may not sell anything which tends to impair health.' The illustration given is ' that liquid fire, commonly called drams, or spirituous liquors.' Of men who sell such liquid fire John Wesley, because it damages their neighbour's bodies, says : ' They are poisoners general. They murder His Majesty's subjects by wholesale, neither does their eye pity or spare. They drive them to hell, like sheep. And what is their gain ? Who then would envy their large estates and sumptuous palaces ? A curse is in the midst of them ; the curse of God cleaves to the stones, and the timber the furniture of them. . . . And canst thou hope, thou man of blood, though thou art clothed in scarlet and fine linen and farest sumptuously every day ; canst thou hope to deliver down thy fields of blood to the third generation ? Not so, for there is a God in heaven ; therefore, thy name shall be rooted out like as those whom thou has destroyed, body and soul, thy memorial shall perish with thee.'

' You must not make money at the expense of another man's soul,' Wesley goes on to say, but the stress of his argument is on doing harm to another man's *body* ; it is laid upon the secular obligation of making no personal gain by damaging another man's body or his substance. ' Nor may we,' he says, ' if we love every one as ourselves,

hurt any one in his substance. We cannot, consistent with brotherly love, sell our goods below market price ; we cannot study to ruin our neighbour's trade in order to advance our own. None gains by swallowing up his neighbour's substance without gaining the damnation of hell ! '

This famous sermon was preached to Methodists who were already beginning to enrich themselves. It is not an essay in economics, but a pointed and practical exhortation to his own people. It is an excellent illustration of the ethical and social character of Wesley's teaching. It shows what Methodism really meant by the term ' love of the neighbour.' Wesley's famous invective against the traffic in spirituous liquors, quoted above, is only very partially understood when exclusively applied to traffic in liquor. The fact that spirituous liquor was damaging people's bodies was a telling illustration of a wider principle. What Wesley was teaching was that any money gained by methods which damaged the substance and health of other people was ill gained, and it applied to money gained in insanitary conditions, as his reference to the manufacture of chemicals in an earlier paragraph of the sermon suggests, as well as to money gained by selling spirits. Wesley was a great evangelist, and not a political economist, but this vigorous statement that money made by disregard of humanity was blood-stained and damnable gold is a proof of the social character of the early Methodist ethic.

While it is not suggested that Wesley's primary concern was the social condition of England, it is asserted that his conscience was always alive to the needs of human beings, and that the idea that the early Methodists were so immersed in introspection and raptures that they had no time to discharge their social duties is so obviously mistaken that it is high time that serious social writers correct, and do not reiterate, the ignorant prejudices of misguided Radicals of the early nineteenth century. Cobbett, Leigh Hunt, and Hazlitt are the persons chiefly responsible for these long-lived

slanders. The greatest social service of John Wesley was after all not his teaching on social service, but his Evangelical Message. That message vitalized the dull soul of England, and in consequence the doors of a new era were flung open. The eighteenth century was a tolerant century, but the ' great public baptism ' of the Evangelical Revival created intolerance of all sorts of evil. It was the intolerance of men like Wilberforce and Shaftesbury—so different from the easy acquiescence of the eighteenth century—which undermined the social barbarities and evils of the early nineteenth century, and that splendid intolerance was born of the Evangelical Revival. The Hammonds write with sympathy of the charming tolerance and common sense of eighteenth-century religion, and with censure of the horrible social conditions with which it acquiesced, and with irony of the narrowness of the Evangelical Revival, and yet they admit the quickening of the mind and soul of England which issued from John Wesley. What becomes more and more plain is that, if there had been no Evangelical Revival, reform could not have come in nineteenth-century England without revolution.

## XXI

## STREAMS OF SOCIAL QUICKENING

The Evangelical Revival was a watershed from which issued many streams. Sometimes writers have followed the course of one, or they have followed several over some of the lands they watered, leaving others unexplored. Wesleyan Methodism, the main stream, is not the only river which needs careful investigation.

It is important to track, so far as one can, the different courses whereby the influence of the Evangelical Revival has run. Its influence on Anglicanism and Nonconformity has been noticed. Its embodiment in Wesleyan Methodism and the Methodist Episcopal Church of America is obvious, but the other religious bodies emanating from these two must never be passed over ; nor must it be forgotten that in the secular sphere the influence of individuals has in some ways been as important as that of the religious organizations.

The reactions of the great Revival on the secular life of England were not uniform ; they have sometimes even clashed. The first great result of the Revival was the vitalization of the minds of the ordinary people, the consequences of which depended, not only on the degree of vitalization, but on the temperaments of the people vitalized. Fresh air was let into the stuffy atmosphere of the eighteenth century ; and Wesley's experience of God resulted in things on which he had never reckoned. The direct results of the Revival were by no means exclusively religious ; the effect on literature, for instance, has already been noticed. Nor did the religious denominations which sprang directly from

the Revival exercise their influence only in the religious world. Hence the question becomes very complicated. We have to bear in mind the direct quickening of the secular as well as of the religious life of England. In addition, we must not forget the *indirect* quickenings of the secular life through the continuing religious quickening of several generations of Christian people, nor the confluence of the Evangelical Revival with certain streams of secular activity. It becomes impossible to measure with exactitude the influence of the Evangelical Revival on the times in which we live. The influence is nearly as incalculable as it is great. What the Celtic strain means in Anglo-Saxon peoples may be an illustration of what the Evangelical Revival has meant in the social thought and organization of our times.

Now, while it is quite impossible to detach from all the complex strands of thought and feeling in the modern world the single strand of the Evangelical Revival and its influence, it is comparatively easy to track some of the social improvements of to-day to their evangelical sources.

Mr. and Mrs. Hammond agree with Halévy in regarding the Methodism of the early nineteenth century as a Conservative force. This is true, no doubt, of the corporate life both of Wesleyan Methodism and of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England. It is also true, in the great majority of cases, of individuals who, like Wilberforce, derived their inspiration from Methodism, but it is not true of them all. A. E. Dobbs notes, for instance, groups with progressive political sympathies. He instances 'a group of Cornish Methodists who became interested in the American War of Independence; Paine's *Age of Reason* was accompanied by the *Rights of Man*, and both were read by a circle of Methodists in Lancashire who were moderate supporters of political reform.[1] The little Methodist Society was a new social unit, from which all sorts of influences, social and educational as well as religious, radiated in many villages.

[1] Dobbs: *Educational and Social Movements*, p. 120.

Many of the Labour leaders of the nineteenth century began their public activities as Methodist local preachers.[1] But the contribution of such men, even in Labour organizations, has often been a Conservative influence in so far as they stood by Christian morality and were opposed to extreme revolutionary action. Halévy points out, as we have seen, that it was their influence which largely made for the steadiness of British social progress.

Certain resolutions of the Methodist Conference might perhaps be regarded as rather reactionary than Conservative. The Methodist raised the wrath of Cobbett, who considered him an enemy of the working man. The Hammonds call Cobbett 'the most quarrelsome man of the day.' It is probably true that the first social loyalty of the Methodist operative of the early nineteenth century was to his Church, and that he would regard with suspicion combinations of men who held the rationalistic views of the early Radical reformers. Where they sympathized with the social views of the Radicals, they would disagree with their religious antagonisms. Furthermore, Methodism would tend to level class distinctions. Master and men, meeting together in the same church and the same class meeting, really treated one another as brothers, hence it would be difficult to turn Methodist operative against Methodist employer. Did that work out badly for social progress? Perhaps there is not sufficient historical information to give a confident answer, but nothing would count more for social progress in England to-day than a friendship of Labour and Capital, and the dissipation of their suspicions of one another.

[1] Out of the many illustrations of the identification of Methodism with progressive social movements which could be given none is more attractive than that of George Loveless, the Wesleyan local preacher and agricultural labourer, who formed a friendly society amongst labourers in Dorsetshire as an instrument of self-defence against outrageous oppression. He was sentenced in 1833 for doing this to seven years transportation 'not,' as the Judge said, 'for anything you have done, or as far as I can see intended to do, but for an example to others.' Monster petitions and widespread agitation caused his release and that of his companions in 1837.

It must be admitted that early nineteenth-century Wesleyans were afraid of democratic activities in ecclesiastical affairs, and this timidity may have had repercussions in secular concerns. The Wesleyan Conference dealt severely with rebels, as the numerous secessions of the time show, and democratic ecclesiastical revolts probably reflected the political and social, as well as the ecclesiastical, feeling of the dissentients.

If, then, the religious organization which was directly derived from the Wesleys was so Conservative, what had happened meanwhile to Wesley's social teaching? There is little sign of its influence on the Wesleyan Conference in the early years of the nineteenth century. The answer is that an ecclesiastical corporation is not the place to seek it. The men who apply logically the teaching of a great religious society are always in England called extremists, which is often another way of saying that only a minority of Englishmen are ever prepared to push logical deductions from principles to practical conclusions.

A religious society, in the nature of the case, includes men of every grade of piety and education. It is not merely an army, but a school, often with a large infant department. Its corporate life expresses its average, not its exceptional, attainments. The objection to the Church that it does not corporately follow its highest ideals is quite true as a matter of fact, but, if it is to be a school for saints, it must have its elementary classes, and they necessarily retard the rate of progress. It has often been said that many Christian reforms have been advocated by the unorthodox, by people outside the Churches, and illustrations no doubt could be given, but it will be found that, when the antecedents and early training of such men are examined, they have usually been deeply Christian. The Church is always leading men into a Christianity higher than that of the average Church life, and she often damps the enthusiasm of the man she trains; and, indeed, such men loosen themselves from her, and

represent her teaching as individuals apart from her more truly than she herself does corporately. But it cannot be otherwise; if the Church is to be really universal in her comprehensiveness, she must include in her embrace undeveloped and imperfectly developed people.

Social reformers often come up against the average corporate life of the Church, and get no effective backing from her for their schemes of amelioration. For this reason we are more likely to trace the social results of the Evangelical Revival in the social service of individual Methodists than in the resolutions of their Conferences.

The principal works of social reform of the nineteenth century were wrought by a few individuals whose social enthusiasm was the direct result of the Evangelical Revival. These men were Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, Richard Oastler, Michael Sadler, Raynor Stephens, Bull the evangelical clergyman, and Fielden (though in later life he became a Unitarian). They were all spiritual sons of John Wesley, and, with the exception of Fielden, all Tories. They were in conflict for the most part with Cobbett, Mill, and Bentham. They disliked Radicalism. They were reformers because they were philanthropists and Methodists. No social work done in England has been more emancipatory than theirs, and the work of Wilberforce had a world-wide significance. Their outlook on national affairs was essentially that of John Wesley, who from a national point of view tended to Conservatism, but whose social sympathies were always with the poor man.

Wesley had no truer son than Lord Shaftesbury; and Oastler, Sadler, and Stephens, all spiritual sons of Wesley, made Lord Shaftesbury's work a possibility. Few have realized the immense service done to the workers of England by these Tory Methodists. From one point of view Methodism was Conservative, and neutralized by its influence wild political adventurers dangerous to the stability of British society in the early nineteenth century;

and from another point of view it was violently rebellious —not, it is true, against ordered society, but against the power of the purse which brutalized human life and was the cause of the revolutionary movements of the times. The humanizing of society was the essentially Christian contribution of Methodism to the social order, and it is impossible to exaggerate its importance. The work of Shaftesbury and his Methodist coadjutors resulted in legislation of as great importance to England as any enacted in the century.

I shall try to show briefly how the Evangelical Revival, through its sons, Shaftesbury, Oastler, Sadler, and Stephens, carried on in the nineteenth century the social teaching of John Wesley.

The Methodist group was Christian first. They probably knew enough of the anti-Christian ideas that underlay the French Revolution to make them suspicious of men like Bentham, Ricardo, and Mill, the founders of Utilitarianism and modern Radicalism. Bentham was a philanthropic man, who at certain times joined forces with the Methodists, but his violent anti-Christianity caused great dislike on the part of Methodists and prejudiced them against his Radical notions. The social revolts and political organizations of the early nineteenth century were badly organized. Halévy's accounts of the activities of Burdett, Cobbett, and Hunt show a state of things not likely to be attractive to the Methodist of the period. England owes no little debt to the steadiness of the Methodists, who, on account of their splendid national organization, might have been a great public danger, but who were unmoved by the clamour of the contradictory voices of the mob orators of the times. Methodists would have nothing to do with revolution ; the anti-Christian grounds on which it was argued made them angry. Their service to the community in their witness to Christianity was undoubtedly conservative of social order. Malthusianism and Utilitarianism, the Radical philosophies

of the day, did not move Methodists. We shall find amongst them one strong opponent of Malthus. The Methodists were moved by much more enduring compulsions than passing Radical theories. What moved them was humanity. Their belief was that human beings were redeemed by Christ, and that oppression of a child of God was an insult to the Heavenly Father. Under these religious impulses, much more fundamental than any other, they did their great work of social emancipation. The Factory Acts and Mines Acts were Shaftesbury's great work, and the men who helped him most, who created the atmosphere in which he could work, were Sadler, Oastler, and Stephens.

Let us begin with Sadler. Michael Sadler was born in 1780 in Derbyshire, where he lived till 1800, when he went to Leeds. He became a Member of Parliament in 1829, but only remained in the House for three years. He was a banker, merchant, and a social reformer, and his chief public activities were outside Parliament, but during the time he was there he was responsible for the report of a Parliamentary Commission on Factories which is now known as the 'Sadler Report.'

Michael Sadler's mother was the daughter of a clergyman. The Methodists started services in the village of Doveridge, where his family lived, towards the end of the eighteenth century. His mother attended them with her children. The Methodists were much persecuted, and Michael Sadler, when twelve years old, was threatened by a profligate man with drowning if he would not curse the Methodists. 'Never,' said the brave boy. 'You may kill me if you choose, but I never will.'[1] Sadler preached for the Methodists in his youth, and one of his earliest publications was a defence of John Wesley. He was for several years superintendent of a large Sunday-school in Leeds, and an active visitor of the Stranger's Friend Society. He did not leave the Church of England when the Methodists separated from

[1] *Biographia Leodensis*, p. 354 *n*.

it, but remained, as many of the better-class Methodists of the time did, a faithful Churchman, like John Wesley himself. Sadler's Methodism made him a lover and servant of humanity. He wielded a skilful pen, and attacked the works of Malthus, and his Methodism was the inspiration of the attack he made on the mechanical views of human society contained in them and the infidel Radical philosophy of the day:

'He was chiefly known for his opposition to the fashionable philosophy of the day; the creed which held that human happiness was best secured by giving to capital absolute control over the lives and liberties of men and women. This doctrine gave such a look of progress and providence to the Agrarian and Industrial Revolution that most thinkers never considered these revolutions in any other aspect. Sadler attacked it fiercely, whether manufacturers appealed to it to justify a free hand in their mills, or landlords appealed to it to justify a free hand in enclosures.

'In the sharp quarrel between landlord and manufacturer, which played so large a part in the history of England at this time, the landlord was apt to pity the factory children as victims of the rapacity of the manufacturers, while the manufacturer looked with an indignant eye on the agricultural labourers as victims of the rapacity of the landlord. Sadler was equally severe on the "irreparable injuries" done to the poor by the method of the enclosures and the sacrifice of child life in the mills. His criticism of his opponents was directed, not to the surface, but to the basis of their position. The savage hardships of the new life of village and town were accepted by the public opinion of the rich, because they had developed a philosophy from the teaching of Malthus, which explained suffering and poverty as Nature's remedy for over-population. Sadler threw himself on this argument with passionate energy, and if his reasoning was, in places, of a primitive character, the force and sincerity of his attack made him the chief opponent in the

workmen's eyes of a creed that was bitter and humiliating to his class. So with the question of factory hours, which he refused to judge from the standpoint of profits or the claims of industry. Any one who gave some other value to the life of a man than its value as a mere unit of energy in a mechanical system was defending the rights of human dignity.'[1]

Sadler was a true son of John Wesley. The human dignity—the dignity of a child of God—that is of every man, was what Sadler stood for against the hard economic theories of the time. The early Radicals were theorists, who gave themselves little concern about individual men as God's children, and the protests of Tory-Methodists of those times on behalf of humanity, and their refusal to be bound hand and foot by theories of society, however plausible, was a factor of the social progress of England of incalculable benefit The Radicals and Utilitarians were teaching, no doubt, the greatest good of the greatest number,' and some of their theories were adopted in later times by Methodists, but the Tory evangelical philanthropic protests of men like Sadler and Shaftesbury, and the insistence on the primary right of human beings to be treated as children of God, rather than 'hands' for the production of wealth, were needed in order to neutralize the hardness of theoretical Radicalism and the merciless economic formulas of what came afterwards to be called the Manchester School.' This evangelical humanism was as important a factor in the creation of modern Liberalism as its early Radicalism.

Sadler's chief helpers in his campaign were two other Methodists, Richard Oastler and Joseph Raynor Stephens. Richard Oastler was, like Sadler, a Methodist who did not leave the Church of England. John Wesley used frequently to stay in his father's house in Leeds. Oastler senior was a local preacher. Richard was born in 1789. 'On Wesley's last visit to Leeds, shortly before his death, he took little

[1] *Lord Shaftesbury*, M. and B. Hammond, pp. 13, 14.

Richard in his arms and invoked a blessing upon him.'[1] Richard Oastler was a strong evangelical, and his social activities were the direct result of his Methodist birth, training, and convictions. Robert Oastler, his father, was a Reformer as well as a Methodist. 'Richard was a kind of hereditary supporter of benevolence, because he inherited it from his father.' He was a friend of Wilberforce, and first came into public notice by his letters to the Leeds *Mercury* against West Indian slavery, which lingered on for a quarter of a century after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Oastler raised the working men of the North of England against the new Poor Law, and particularly against the infamous conditions of child labour. He was called 'The Factory Child's King' and later 'The Old King.' He was a man of warm sympathy and boundless enthusiasm, into whom 'the gods had breathed no ordinary powers of vituperative diction.[2] His experience in fighting the slave trade gave him metaphors and parallels for oppressive child labour which were effective against the rapacity of British manufacturers. It is interesting to note that not only was he an evangelical, but he caught his inspiration from John Wood, an evangelical manufacturer.

The story is told in Oastler's own words 'My friend [Wood] was in bed, but he was not asleep; he was leaning upon a table beside his bed. On that table were placed two candles; between them was the open Bible. On my advancing toward the side of his bed, he turned towards me, reached out his hand, and, in the most impressive and affectionate manner, pressing my hand in his, he said, "I have had no sleep to-night. I have been reading this book, and in every page I have read my own condemnation. I cannot allow you to leave me without a pledge that you will use all your influence in endeavouring to remove from our factory system the cruelties which are regularly practised in our mills." . . .

[1] *Biographia Leodensis*, p. 500.
[2] Alfred's *History of the Factory System*, p. 94, quoted in Bready's *Shaftesbury*.

I promised my friend that I would do what I could. I felt that we were, each of us, in the presence of the Highest. I knew that that vow was recorded in Heaven. I have kept it; the grace of God having upholden me, I have been faithful.'[1]

Oastler suffered for his opinions. His enemies charged both Sadler and him with dishonest use of money, but Halévy exculpates them.[2] He lost his business position through their malice, and was prosecuted for debt, and spent three years in the Fleet Prison—but ultimately public subscriptions set him free, and his monument stands to-day in Bradford, an expression of the gratitude of the northern industrial workers who loved and honoured him.

His chief coadjutor, both in anti-Poor Law protests and in agitation for the Ten Hours' Factory Bill, was Joseph Raynor Stephens, a Wesleyan minister, his equal in zeal and invective and a romantic character. Like Sadler and Oastler, he was a Tory as well as a Methodist, but his Toryism was, it must be admitted, of a somewhat piebald character. He was suspended from the Wesleyan ministry for association with political efforts to disestablish the Church of England. Complicity with politics, particularly if they did not support the Conservative Party, was frowned on by the Wesleyan Conference of that time. He became a minister of a church of his own at Stalybridge. He was the child of a distinguished Methodist family; his father had been President of the Wesleyan Conference in 1827, and his brother, George Stephens, was an eminent archaeologist. G. J. Holyoake wrote his biography, a work of great interest. J. R. Stephens had a roving disposition, and was as hard as nails. His minimization of his hardships in prison, where he was sent for eighteen months on account of an incendiary speech, makes interesting reading, and is descriptive of the man.

'To a man,' he wrote, 'who has slept soundly with a sod for a bed and portmanteau for his pillow, within a stone's throw of the North Cape, and who has made himself quite

[1] Alfred, Vol. I., p. 94, quoted in Bready's *Shaftesbury*. [2] Halévy III. 119 *n*.

at home among Laplanders and Russians, there is nothing so very, very frightful in a moderately good jail, as jails go now.'

Stephens was a powerful orator, although, no doubt, extravagant ; he was a true son of the Methodist Revival, and a great supporter of Richard Oastler. These two men together were invaluable to Sadler, and afterwards to Shaftesbury, although painful disagreements at one time caused a temporary division between them and Shaftesbury. They were both uncompromising enthusiasts, born agitators, but without their work Shaftesbury would have been impotent. The work of that great evangelical saint and philanthropist should never be dissociated from the splendid services of Sadler, Oastler, and Stephens, who did more than any men to create the public opinion necessary for the great reforms wrought by legislation. Halévy's words are weighty and unanswerable :

'The historian of the movement which produced the Factory Acts must not forget the many tributaries which swelled the main stream. But the source of the river was the piety and Christian sentiment of the evangelicals.'[1]

The great work which these ardent reformers did in co-operation with Shaftesbury was the passing of the Ten Hours' Act, and, by means of it, a succession of Acts ameliorating the inhuman conditions of labour—particularly child labour—precipitated by the Industrial Revolution. The story cannot be told here. Before the Parliamentary responsibility was taken up by Shaftesbury (Lord Ashley, as he was in those days), let it not be forgotten that Michael Sadler was the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee which inquired into factory conditions, and made appalling revelations of their almost incredible inhumanity. By forcing the attention of the Parliamentary Committee on these revelations, Sadler made acquiescence with things as they were impossible. The Hammonds write :

[1] Halévy III. 112.

The report of Sadler's Committee is a classical document; it is one of the main sources of our knowledge of the conditions of the factory life at the time. Its pages bring before the reader in the vivid form of dialogue the kind of life that was led by the victims of the new system. Men and women, who were old at twenty, from all the industrial districts, passed before their rulers with their tale of weariness, misery, and diseased and twisted limbs. A worsted spinner of Huddersfield, Joseph Habergam, aged seventeen, described his day's work at the age of seven. His hours were from five in the morning to eight at night, with one solitary break of thirty minutes at noon. All other meals had to be taken in snatches, without interruption of work.

'Did you not become very drowsy and sleepy towards the end of the day, and feel much fatigued?'

'Yes; that began about three o'clock, and grew worse and worse; and it came to be very bad towards six and seven.'

'What means were taken to keep you at your work so long?'

'There were three overlookers; there was one, a head overlooker, and there was one man kept on purpose to grease the machines, and there was one kept on purpose to strap.'

His brother, who worked in the same mill, died at sixteen of spinal affection, due to his work, and he himself began to grow deformed after six months of it.

'How far do you live from the mill?'

'A good mile.'

'Was it very painful for you to move?'

'Yes, in the morning I could scarcely walk, and my brother and sister used, out of kindness, to take me under each arm and run with me to the mill, and my legs dragged on the ground; in consequence of the pain I could not walk.'

Another witness, an overseer in a flax-spinning mill at Dundee, said there were nine workers under his charge who had begun work before they were nine years old, and six of them were splay-footed and the other three deformed in other ways. A tailor at Stanningley, Samuel Coulson, who had three daughters in the mill, described the household when the mill was busy. In the ordinary time the hours were from six in the morning to half-past eight at night; in the brisk time, for six weeks in the year, these girls, the youngest of them 'going eight,' worked from three in the morning to half-past ten at night. . . .

'Were the children excessively fatigued by this labour?' 'Many times; we have cried often when we have given them the little victualling we had to give them; we had to shake them, and they

have fallen to sleep with the victuals in their mouths many a time.'

Another witness, Gillett Sharpe, described how his boy, who had been very active and a good runner, gradually lost the use of his limbs at the mill. 'I had three steps up into my house, and I have seen that boy get hold of the sides of the door to assist his getting up into the house; many a one advised me to take him away; they said he would be ruined and made quite a cripple; but I was a poor man, and could not afford to take him away, having a little family of six children under my care.'[1]

And so the report goes on with painful iteration, revealing a state of things as bad as the revelations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but with the difference that it is a prosaic Parliamentary report and not a work of fiction. Sadler, unfortunately, stood at the next election for Leeds, and the manufacturers of that city, like Demetrius the silversmith of Ephesus, had no use for a man whose religion might damage their pockets. Sadler was not elected, and the cause of the children was left leaderless in the House of Commons. This was the opportunity of Lord Shaftesbury, and two philanthropic evangelicals—it was always evangelicals, note—Sir Andrew Agnew, a Scottish member, and the Rev. E. S. Bull, an evangelical clergyman, asked Shaftesbury, Sadler's friend and supporter, to take up Sadler's work. So he became the champion of the poor, 'and regarded himself as the choice of the workers. He said in the House of Commons that he represented the operatives, and that he was elected by them just as much as any minister was elected by any constituency.'[2]

Now Shaftesbury's work is known by every one. How he prevailed after many struggles with interested capitalists, and with doctrinaire Radicals and manufacturers, who feared the evangelical insistence on humanity, and talked eloquently about the laws of supply and demand and foreign competition, is well known. The Ten Hours' Act was

[1] *Lord Shaftesbury*, by J. L. and Barbara Hammond, p. 21. [2] Ibid. 16–18.

passed, and the other Acts which have humanized life in the factories of England followed. The Commission on Mines made revelations as painful as those on the factories, and the weary warfare between God and Mammon took place again ; for, in the opinion of Shaftesbury, God and humanity were one—against Mammon and Moloch. He pursued his work for child chimney-sweepers and for needy children of every kind with unremitting devotion. Not only did he save them from the conditions under which their existence was made a dull and satanic serfdom, but, by his ragged schools, strove to educate them, and brighten their lives. He was at the forefront of every philanthropic movement. He declined opportunities of political advancement, and fortunately never became enmeshed in party machinery, but went on with a work of well-doing the account of which made Cardinal Manning say, ' I have done nothing.'

But what of Shaftesbury's sources of inspiration? Mr. Wesley Bready has done great service in writing an evangelical life of Lord Shaftesbury and showing clearly that it was because he was a saint that Shaftesbury was so good a citizen. The Hammonds give a rather grudging assent to the same view, and yet they say it was a misfortune that his mind was shaped in his infancy by a Methodist nurse. Shaftesbury displayed a certain narrowness, no doubt, in his religious views, but would he have been of much service to humanity apart from his religion? Shaftesbury realized and lived out the social implications of the Evangelical Revival. All evangelicals have not done so. In so far as they have not, they have not been the true spiritual children of John Wesley ; but Shaftesbury was his spiritual son ; he honoured Wesley as the greatest man of his times, and his social service was the logical outcome of Wesley's teaching, the natural product of the Evangelical Revival.

John Wesley, in the providence of God, was saved from a burning rectory, and felt himself to be a brand

plucked from the burning that he might set England on fire. The hand of God was as visibly at work in the childhood of Lord Shaftesbury. Amongst the heroines of Methodism none is worthy of higher rank than the humble woman, Maria Millis, who, in the midst of his pagan home, taught Anthony Ashley to love Jesus Christ. She may rank with Susanna Wesley as amongst the great women of Methodism. The influence of his evangelical religion is written so largely over Shaftesbury's diaries, and was expressed so simply and boldly, that it needs no detailed description, but it made Shaftesbury what he was, and, through him and his Methodist helpers, broke down many of the prison walls of the industrial England of the nineteenth century.

The beneficent results of the Methodist Revival in the spheres of social and secular life are coming to light in our own days, but no stream of secular influence is so easy to trace directly as that of the work of the Tory Methodists of the first half of the nineteenth century. They are an evidence of the claim that to make saints is in the long run to make citizens, because the most loyal citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven are most anxious about the imperial expansion of their Kingdom. The patriots of 'another country—an heavenly' are the men who do most to establish the new Jerusalem on earth. William Blake, who understood the horrors of the Industrial Revolution, felt the influence of the Evangelical Revival. Never have the aspirations of the early Methodists been more truly or nobly expressed than by his immortal lines:

> And did those feet in ancient time
> Walk upon England's mountains green:
> And was the Holy Lamb of God
> On England's pleasant pastures seen?
>
> And did the Countenance Divine
> Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
> And was Jerusalem builded here
> Among these dark Satanic mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall the Sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant Land.

# Part VI

# THE WESLEYAN HYMNODY

'Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest;
Like a cloud of fire
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.'

—Shelley.

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## XXII

## CHARLES WESLEY AND HIS HYMNS

The hymns of Charles Wesley are prized by multitudes of people as their best inheritance from the eighteenth century. It is likely they will outlive his brother's writings. Much, perhaps all, that John Wesley wrote may soon become of interest only to antiquarians. His *Sermons* and *Notes on the New Testament* are little read to-day, although his *Journal* is perhaps read as much as ever, at least outside Methodism, and is likely to remain an eighteenth-century classic. But John Wesley's great medium of expression, his organization, has changed and is changing in shape, and must change if his people are to endure. Some of his characteristic institutions and customs are dead, others dying. The early morning preaching on which he placed such emphasis has gone ; love-feasts have largely died out ; the covenant service has altered so as to be almost unrecognizable ; watch-nights remain attenuated in character and different in purpose ; bands have gone ; the class meeting has followed them in most Methodist communities, and is threatened with total extinction. The relation to the Church of England cherished by Wesley perished soon after his death. Legislation will soon materialize in England whereby Conference, as Wesley instituted it, will cease to exist. Some of these changes indicate the pressure of new convictions, others a decreased spirituality. Some of them are improvements of the machinery, and others denote a change of mentality which has made adaptation imperative ; but little remains in the form in which Wesley left it, and, where the old names exist, the things they stand for are different. That John Wesley would

have approved of many of the changes I have as little doubt as that he would have disapproved of others, but it was no little part of his genius that he left behind him a constitution and organization, firm enough not to be changed frivolously, but elastic enough to be changed when necessary.

Charles Wesley's work was different. His medium was the English language ; and he was one of the men who have done something to give it fixity, for few things do so more surely than widely-spread popular verse. He sang the eternal gospel and the unchanging needs of human beings. Where his song, through its doctrinal influence on controverted points of theology, was most immediately effective in his own age, it is likely to be least enduring. The technical theological terms of the eighteenth century cause some of his hymns to seem antiquated in the twentieth. But of the hymns generally current during the last hundred years, there are comparatively few of which this is true. An archaic word here and there, no doubt, spoil some of them for congregational singing, but only trifling emendations are needed to give many such hymns a new currency.

His festival hymns, his hymns about Jesus, his hymns to the Holy Spirit, his hymns of penitence, his hymns of experience, his hymns for Christian men in every mood of doubt and fear, temptation and trial, struggle and sorrow, comfort and triumph, hope and despair, and his hymns of rejoicing and final victory, are for all centuries, and perhaps for eternity.

Let *all* the Saints in concert sing.

These hymns have long since ceased to belong to Methodists. They belong to all who need them. They have done more than any modern hymns to enrich the praises of the Church, and to arouse the people outside it, and are likely to endure as long as the English language remains an instrument of praise and prayer. It is impossible to exaggerate the influence of Charles Wesley's hymns upon the

Methodist people. The only great literature known to many thousands of them has been Wesley's hymns, the Bible, and the *Pilgrim's Progress* ; and the hymns in many cases have been the most treasured of the three. An illiterate but devout Methodist local preacher of a past generation was dying in a north of England village, and was in so great distress of soul that the superintendent minister was brought in post-haste from the Circuit town ten miles away to see him. The good old man told the minister that the problem that worried him was that when he met his Lord, as he thought he must in a few hours' time, he would have to tell him that he had been an ungrateful child. God had given him the Bible—His own book—but he would have to make the confession that he had loved the hymn-book better ! The minister comforted the simple old man, and told him God could understand Methodists. ' Well,' said the old man, ' if you think it's all right, let us sing,' and in a dying voice he began singing

> Leader of faithful souls, and Guide
> Of all who seek the land above,

and died before the hymn was finished.

That story of a rustic illiterate Methodist exaggerates very little the obligation of innumerable hosts of Methodists to Charles Wesley. And the spiritual quickening which millions of living men and women derive from these hymns is perhaps the greatest of all the abiding values of the Evangelical Revival.

The hymns of Charles Wesley have been the chief medium of inspiration of Methodists since the death of the Wesleys. Nothing else can express with anything like their force the spirit of their teaching, practice, and experience. The fires of revival are still lighted by these flaming verses. The deep and fervid religious experience enshrined in them is sought and recovered by those who sing them. Just as the evangelical experience expressed itself in the hymns, so the hymns

re-create the evangelical experience. Essential Methodism will not die so long as the hymns of Charles Wesley are sung—and an inability to sing them, if it prevailed, would be the surest of all signs that Methodism was dead, however much it might have a name that it was alive, and however many millions of persons were numbered in its statistical returns. The hymns are living things which have survived for two centuries, and probably are sung by more people to-day than in any past time. This is not true of all of them—but it is true of many.

Charles Wesley was not a great man in the sense that John was, but his gift of poetry has given him an influence that may conceivably outlast his brother's. The relative greatness of the two brothers is no doubt to some extent a matter of standpoint. The influence of a statesman is different from that of a poet; but one can hardly think of the two brothers in contrast without realizing that those elements of powerful personality which make a Richelieu or a Napoleon or a John Wesley under certain circumstances ruthless men, and give them a self-consciousness of their own destiny which profoundly influences their action, and sometimes is the only thing that justifies it, is quite absent in Charles. John could, in the nature of the case, be in no place but the first. Charles realized that as clearly as John. The real founder of the 'Holy Club' was Charles, but when John joined he went quite naturally into the Chair.

There are many autobiographical touches in Charles Wesley's hymns, and he complained to God of nothing more often than his pride, but one really wonders whether he ought not to have called it vanity. John was naturally a proud man, with the magnificent pride of Milton's Lucifer, a character which apparently attracted him as a boy at Charterhouse. 'Better to rule in hell than serve in heaven,' as he said to the master who asked him why he was always to be found among small boys.[1] With Charles, pride was

[1] This incident, though disputed, is not improbable.

rather of the social order which one finds in a man of good birth and education such as his was. He evidently felt the criticism levelled at him by his social equals. In his obituary verses on Robert Jones, a gentleman whom he had led to Christ, he writes :

> O what a change was there! The man of birth
> Sinks down into a clod of common earth ;
> The man of polished sense his judgement quits,
> And tamely to a madman's name submits.

Charles Wesley was temperamentally conventional. He preserved his loyalties to his Church, his family, and his social order. He married into a county family, and his home, largely no doubt because of the precocious musical genius of his sons, was visited by the great people of the day. His conscious superiority irritated the lay preachers, but he tried to be kind to them—that was the trouble, he *tried* ; he wrote to Cennick, for instance, saying : ' God is my witness how *condescendingly* loving I have been to you.'[1] The word ' condescending ' explains a great deal. His social prejudices unquestionably dominated his mind when he prevented the marriage of John Wesley and Grace Murray, a person socially inferior to the Wesleys. ' All our preachers would leave us, all our Societies disperse,' he said, if his brother John ' married so *mean* a woman.'[2] ' No one was more jealous concerning the good name of his elder brother. The strength of his loyalty made him hypercritical, nervous, irritable, and therefore a dangerous ally.'

An interesting instance of the feeling of these two brothers about reputation is quoted in Jackson's *Life of Charles Wesley*. His daughter Sarah said, ' I think it was in 1775 my uncle promised to take me with him to Canterbury and Dover.' Mrs. John Wesley at the time was trying to make scandal on the basis of letters she deliberately mutilated. ' My dear father, to whom the reputation of my uncle was far dearer than his own, saw the importance of immediate

[1] *W. J.* II. 434. [2] Ibid. III. 431 *n.*

refutation, and set off at once to see my uncle to induce him to postpone his journey.'

'When he returned, he said—"My brother is indeed an extraordinary man. I placed before him the importance of the character of a minister, the evil consequences which might result from his indifference to it; and urged him by every relative and public motive to answer for himself, and stop the publication. His reply was—'Brother, when I devoted to God my ease, my time, my life, did I except my reputation? No. Tell Sally I will take her to Canterbury to-morrow.'"'

The difference of the two men could hardly be better illustrated than by this incident—the one quite indifferent to scandal, the other more conventional, and moved by the feelings that influence most normal persons. John was careless about reputation, Charles careful. Both men had sublimated, to use a good psycho-analysis label, their natural characteristics, but John's superiority to reputation at a lower level means pride, and Charles's respect of it at a lower level means vanity.

Nothing illustrates better the loyal character and rather conventional mentality of Charles than his devotion to the Church of England. That devotion is hardly exaggerated by his verses, ridiculous as they seem to-day, in his obituary poem on Robert Jones (whose loyalty to the Anglican Church, notwithstanding his Methodism, Charles Wesley admired):

> With pious JONES and ROYAL CHARLES may I
> A martyr for the *Church of England* die!

Charles was a lovable man, irascible but really quite humble and forgiving, gentle and loyal, happy in his wife and family, but not made of the iron out of which his brother John was forged, although possessed of a gift of genius perhaps more fruitful than any other gift of either of them. He was more fitted for ordinary life than John, and perhaps

one may say much more human. Charles was loved by his own circle; his popularity in his Oxford days was notable, and he was always a friendly soul. People who met John often hated him and obeyed him, and those who loved him took no liberties with him. The indignation he roused among his contemporaries, as the tracts of the times show, was very strong. He had the misfortune to be nearly always right in his contentions, and that does not make for popularity in controversy. Except in one instance—the hymns of Charles attached to John's sermon on free grace—the storms of criticism fell upon John's writings, although the hymns of Charles were really more dangerous. And even to this day it is easier for many people to love Charles Wesley than John, however much one admires the elder brother.

Perhaps the strangest thing about the poetry of Charles is that his genius as a hymn-writer only burst forth two days after his conversion,[1] when he wrote his great prophetic hymn, 'Where shall my wondering soul begin,' to be followed in the next two or three years by a large proportion of his most popular, and perhaps his greatest, hymns. His conversion seems to have given him a direct inspiration, and he created, no doubt unconsciously, an instrument of the Revival of incalculable value. Many of his hymns throw light on his character. They are fervent, impulsive, penitent, joyous, battling, and victorious. They often describe fallings away from God and returnings to Him. All that has been characteristic of the Methodist religious temperament is to be found in Charles Wesley's hymns. Could Methodism have existed without them? From the beginning they were as vitally important, even as a constructive instrument, as John's organization. The elder brother saw their practical value and used them to the fullest extent. As a challenge to the nation they were quite unique. Dr. Watts had done much to enrich the hymnody of

[1] See Chapter VI.

Nonconformists, but Charles Wesley did not primarily, in his first great poetic impulse, try to do that. His hymns were a challenge to the world.

O for a trumpet voice,
On all the world to call!
To bid their hearts rejoice
In Him who died for all;
For all my Lord was crucified
For all, for all my Saviour died!

And where they were not a challenge to the world, they told the evangelical story of salvation and its liberty and joy. The birthday and anniversary hymns of Charles Wesley are very attractive. The best known of them all is the hymn written probably on the first anniversary of his own conversion, in some ways, of all Methodist hymns, the most illuminating of the spirit, meaning, and mission of Methodism. Its first verses are no longer current; they recorded the poet's own personal experience—here is one stanza:

Then with my *heart* I first believed,
Believed with faith divine:
Power with the Holy Ghost received
To call the Saviour *mine*.

As he meditated on that great experience, he went on:

O for a thousand tongues to sing
*My* great Redeemer's praise,
The glory of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!

*My* gracious Master and *my* God
Assist *me* to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad
The honours of Thy name.

The thankful child of God eager to win the world for Christ strikes the personal note throughout the hymns, '*My* great Redeemer,' 'His blood availed for *me*.'

Now it is on that personal note that the strength of Charles Wesley's hymns rests—and, according to many, their weakness—for public worship. These hymns, they say, are too subjective, too self-centralized in their experience for the normal praise of the congregation. The criticism is not without point.

There is a distinct difference between the hymns of Charles Wesley and the great hymns of the Early Church.

We praise *Thee*, O God : we acknowledge *Thee* to be the Lord

suggests a praise of God wider than the personal liberty which always gave wings to the evangelical hymn,

His blood availed for *me*.

No doubt the personal note in Charles Wesley has been over-emphasized, if not in his, in some of the modern hymns of evangelicalism. But, after all, is there anything for which a man can praise God so heartily and honestly as personal liberty? Is there a work of God greater? Does not a valid experience of a God actually breaking through the clouds and manifesting His glory to a human being create a joy in God, and a joyous and reverent adoration, deeper than any recital of His works in creation, or even apart from experience, in redemption? Be that as it may, the fact that turned the heart of Charles Wesley to sing God's praise was his conversion. The discovery of God's love was the re-creation of all things for him, and made him sing with a joy and sweetness equalled by no other singer of the gospel.

The only hymn-writer who can be compared with Charles Wesley is Dr. Isaac Watts. He was the man who caused the Churches to break away from the sole singing of psalms. He humanized and modernized the service of praise. It might be thought, especially as John Wesley was sufficiently unprejudiced to use the great Nonconformist's hymns from

the beginning, that he exerted a strong influence on Methodist hymnody. It is a rather remarkable fact that this was not the case. John Wesley's inspiration, as is well known, came from the German Moravian hymns, of which he made such superb versions, and Charles seems to have been directly influenced only by his own religious experience. Louis Benson, in his work *The English Hymn*, which is perhaps the best treatment of the subject published, even suggests that Watts owed much to the Wesleys.'[1] Watts's hymns for a long time were only used in Nonconformist circles, and it was actually the Evangelical Revival which set the Nonconformists singing them. For, while they felt the singing impulse of the Revival, they did not take readily to the fervid Methodist song. Watts became the dominant influence among them.

To-day it is a commonplace to couple the names of Watts and Charles Wesley at the head of English hymnody, with little disposition to ask which name is the greater. But this attitude of the modern Church toward them has been attained very gradually. It involved a complete readjustment of the claim of the two men upon the Church's favour, that became possible only after a gradual enlargement of the Church's heart ; in effecting which the Wesleys have been among the chief agents. Two features of the original situation sufficiently explain this.

*First.* The contrast existed already in the actual work of the two men, judged from the point of view of availableness for general use. Watts's felicity lay in his gift for locating the common level and his refusal to soar. He embodied the theology of his surroundings, and kept within the average range of spiritual experience.

The work of Charles Wesley ' did not commend itself to current taste as poetry. To the average worshipper it would hardly suggest itself as adapted for singing ; for he had no experience of the use of anything like this as material of

[1] Benson : *The English Hymn*, p. 163.

praise and knew no tunes in these strange metres. Its theology was aggressively in the opposition, and heated by the controversial spirit. The spiritual levels on which Charles Wesley moved were immeasurably above the average experience or even ambition.'[1]

*Second.* There was the same contrast in the extent of the opportunity for the general diffusion of their hymns afforded by the respective circumstances of Watts and Charles Wesley.

'Watts moved in the social uplands of English Nonconformity. . . . But while Watts advanced by the highways seen and respected of all, the Wesleys worked behind the hedges separating them from both Church and State.' 'It is difficult now to reproduce even to the imagination the "Reproach of Methodism," and to appreciate the isolation of the Methodist Movement from contemporary religious activity or stagnation. It would be idle to deny that the Wesleyan hymns suffered from their associations. The contagion of this fervid Methodist song could not be felt, so long as the Methodists and the Churches were not brought into contact.'[2]

But Wesley was to go further than Watts in the long run, although a few of the hymns of Watts are incomparable.

> God is a name my soul adores,
> Join all the glorious names,
> When I survey the wondrous cross,

are immortal. And

> Come ye, that love the Lord

might have been written by Wesley.

The joyous tone of

> We are marching through Immanuel's ground
> To fairer worlds on high,

is of the Wesleyan character.

[1] Benson: *The English Hymn*, p. 257. [2] Ibid.

But Watts never soared, at best he marched There is a weight and dignity about some of the greatest hymns of Watts which can hardly be matched in those of Charles Wesley. The styles of the two men are different. The architecture of Watts's hymns is solid Norman, and of Charles Wesley's rich and soaring—Gothic. Watts makes a stately progress through Immanuel's land, but Wesley soars like an eagle into the blazing light of fairer worlds on high.

Watts could hardly have written the following verses :

I cannot see Thy face, and live !
  Then let me see Thy face and die :
Now, Lord, my gasping spirit receive ;
  Give me on eagle's wings to fly,
With eagle's eyes on Thee to gaze,
And plunge into the glorious blaze !

The fullness of my vast reward
  A blest eternity shall be ;
But hast Thou not on earth prepared
  Some better thing than this for me ?
What, but one drop ! one transient sight !
I want a sun, a sea of light.

The spirit of Charles Wesley was the eagle spirit, and he raised men by his songs into heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

The power of song in great Revivals, national or religious, cannot be over-estimated. The singing of the Wesleyan hymns in the eighteenth century was not the first victorious singing of the gospel. The baptized pagans of Charlemagne's Empire remained pagans until the minstrels were instructed in a later reign to sing the gospel to the people. John Wesley was an empire maker in the religious world, but the hearts of the men his organizations have welded together were won by the hymns of his brother, and the sweet singer of Methodism is of no less value to the Church than the great Itinerant.

## XXIII

## THE HYMNS AS LITERATURE

MILTON, when he wrote *Paradise Lost*, felt a need of higher inspiration than that of the Muses for his

> Adventurous song
> That with no middle flight intends to soar
> Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
> Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

So he appealed to the Inspirer of Moses and David, and then to the Holy Spirit. Of Charles Wesley's spiritual inspiration there is little doubt, but did he get anything from the Muses and 'th' Aonian Mount'? Most writers on English verse give no attention to Wesley beyond a patronizing smile, but here and there, after two hundred years of neglect, literary critics are making the discovery that Charles Wesley was a poet, and a great writer of a certain sort of English lyric.

John Wesley knew that his brother was a poet, and John was no mean literary critic. In his own opinion, at any rate, he was something of a connoisseur, and at times he shows a touch of patronage, the heritage, doubtless, of his Oxford days, as when he writes of a sermon of Whitefield's he once heard: 'How wise is God in giving different talents to different preachers. Even the *little improprieties both of his language and manner* were a means of profiting many, who would not have been touched by a more correct discourse, or a more calm and regular manner of speaking.'

His own strong style, plain and unadorned, was admired greatly, for instance, by Edward Fitzgerald, who, writing

of his *Journal* and of the period, says: 'It is remarkable to read pure and unaffected English, while Addison and Johnson are tainted with a style which all the world imitated.'[1]

John did not fail to criticize his brother's writings when he disapproved of them. The members of the Wesley family were faithful with each other about their faults, and John wrote of a collection of Charles's verses: 'Some are bad, some are mean, and some are most excellently good'; but his greatest tribute to Charles was in his famous preface —one of his most vigorous and self-revealing writings:

> May I be permitted to add a few words with regard to the poetry? Then I will speak to those who are the judges thereof with all freedom and unreserve. To these I may say without offence:
>
> 1. In these hymns there is no doggerel; no botches; nothing put in to patch up the rhyme; no feeble expletives.
>
> 2. Here is nothing turgid or bombast on the one hand, or low and creeping on the other.
>
> 3. Here are no *cant* expressions; no words without meaning . . . we talk common sense both in verse and prose, and use no word but in a fixed and determinate sense.
>
> 4. Here are (allow me to say) both the purity, the strength, and the elegance of the English language; and at the same time the utmost simplicity and plainness suited to every capacity. Lastly I desire men of taste to judge (these are the only competent judges;) whether there is not in some of the following verses the true Spirit of Poetry; such as cannot be acquired by art and labour; but must be the gift of nature. By labour a man may become a tolerable imitator of SPENSER, SHAKESPEARE, or MILTON and may heap together pretty compound epithets, as pale-eyed, meek-eyed, and the like. But unless he is born a Poet, he will never attain the genuine Spirit of Poetry.

There is to-day a growing tendency to admit that this is not only a sound judgement of poetry, but a very moderate estimate of his brother's genius. A recent writer of authority on English poetry,[2] W. J. Courthope, says

[1] Quoted in Bett's *Hymns of Methodism*, p. 4.
[2] W. J. Courthope: *A History of English Poetry*, Vol. V.

that John Wesley was fully justified in his claim, and asserts that Charles Wesley was 'the most admirable *devotional* lyric poet in the English language.' The time will come when some of Charles Wesley's hymns will not only be catalogued at the head of the sub-class 'devotional,' but will take a high place, without qualification, among English lyrics. Nothing but absurd prejudices against 'hymns' could exclude 'Wrestling Jacob' from our anthologies. There are few English lyrics to compare with it, not only in its splendid ascension of emotional feeling, gathering strength in its flight, till it reaches its overwhelming climax, but also in its felicity of phrase and the rich and suggestive beauty of its expressive and allusive imagery.

'I need hardly observe,' wrote Edgar Allan Poe, 'that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of its elevating excitement.'

Wesley's hymns stand that test as well as any poetry in the English language. It may perhaps be argued that it is the evangelical content of the hymns of Charles Wesley rather than their poetic form which produces elevation of soul, and also that it only produces such elevation in certain kinds of devout persons, and hence the hymn lacks the universal appeal of great poetry. There is no doubt a measure of truth in that opinion. But is it not also true of the content of much other poetry we call great that it depends on its substance as well as its form? Many of Charles Wesley's hymns regarded only as literature have the true spirit of poetry, and could challenge the severest tests of critics if they would only deign to read them. The experience the hymns contain expound and promote was so vividly realized by the poetic soul of Charles Wesley that he lived it again as a poet, and it is on account of his genuine poetic gift that his evangelism still flames in his sublime lyrics.

What are the tests by which Wesley's hymns can be

judged as literature? Edgar Allan Poe's 'elevation of soul' is one; but take another. Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, in his *The Idea of Great Poetry*, writes: 'Poetry exists as the perfect expression of experience within the possibilities of language.' 'Poetry differs from the rest of literature precisely in this—it does not merely tell us what a man experienced, it makes his very experience live again in our minds, by means of what I have called the incantation of its words.' 'What, then, is the first thing which we require of all poetry—not merely in order to be great, but to exist at all? I will call it compendiously "incantation"—the power of using words so as to produce in us a sort of enchantment; and by that I mean a power, not merely to charm and delight, but to kindle our minds with unusual vitality, exquisitely aware both of things and of the connexion of things.'

'What is pure poetry? What but the poetry which expresses pure experience? And that simply means, *experience itself*; experience valued merely as such, in and for itself.'[1]

Examine Charles Wesley's hymns by these standards and can any one doubt they are true poetry? What verse makes experience more vivid? Who makes experience live again more powerfully? Is there any poet who knows the power of incantation better? After all, the evangelical experience is one of the great human experiences. The historical results of it in English history are noted by all our modern historians. The poems that enshrine such an experience and make it live again in enchanting words ought to count as among the most valuable in literature. Take one of the simplest and most popular, though least literary, expressions of the evangelical experience, and it is easy to see how the lilt and rhythm of the verses express and recreate the experience.

> My God, I am Thine;
> What a comfort divine,
> What a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine!

[1] *The Idea of Great Poetry*, Abercrombie, 1925, pp. 22–3.

In the Heavenly Lamb
Thrice happy I am,
And my heart it doth dance at the sound of His name.

True pleasures abound
In the rapturous sound;
And whoever hath found it hath Paradise found.

The very choice of this peculiar, if not original, rhythm to express exultant joy is a poetical feat. No one would cite this hymn as one of Charles Wesley's best poems, but it fulfils many of Mr. Abercrombie's conditions. The metre is deliberately chosen to express joyous experience, and it has become a great instrument in creating it. It is true that this hymn produces its effect by its metrical lilt rather than by magical words, but words and rhythm combined have 'elevated many souls.'

Charles Wesley's greatest poetical description of his personal evangelical experience is 'Wrestling Jacob,' quoted in an earlier chapter, but he expressed it scores of times, and never more concisely than in the words:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

Is it possible to quote six lines of truer poetry, if Mr. Abercrombie's standards are accepted, than this stanza? The image of the soul in the dungeon awakened by a direct ray of light from God's eye, so that it is at once illuminated and emancipated, and goes out of darkness and night into a new day, is presented with concentrated force by magical words. The third and fourth lines are wonderfully condensed and powerful. But it is futile to quote a verse or two where hundreds of verses leap to one's mind as illustrative of these poetic principles.

Certain qualities of Charles Wesley's verses are worth attention—for instance, their power of movement. They march, they dance, they fly. Is such movement partially due to the fact that many of them were composed on horseback?

'I went on,' says Charles Wesley, writing about one of his long rides, 'singing or making hymns till I got unawares to Canterbury.'

What descriptive movement there is in his verses! One can see the army gathering, the conflict joined, the rout of the enemy, in picturesque verses such as:

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armour on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through His eternal Son.

Jesu's tremendous Name
Puts all His foes to flight,
Jesus, the meek, the angry Lamb,
A lion is in fight.

By all hell's host withstood,
We all hell's host o'erthrow,
And, conquering them through Jesu's blood,
We still to conquer go.

Many of his verses dance. No other medium but a sort of dance rhythm can express the evangelical joy.

How happy are they
Who their Saviour obey,
And have laid up their treasure above!
Tongue cannot express
The sweet comfort and peace
Of a soul in its earliest love.

But the eagle flight of his verse is common.

Come on, my partners in distress,

notwithstanding the clumsy character of its first verse, which I omit, invites comparison with Shelley's 'Skylark.' The upward struggle of the souls enmeshed by the trammels of this world is wonderfully described.

Beyond the bounds of time and space,
Look forward to that heavenly place,
The saints' secure abode:
On faith's strong eagle-pinions rise,
And force your passage to the skies,
And scale the mount of God.

Thrice blessèd, bliss-inspiring hope!
It lifts the fainting spirits up,
It brings to life the dead;
Our conflicts here shall soon be past,
And you and I ascend at last,
Triumphant with our Head.

That great, mysterious Deity
We soon with open face shall see;
The beatific sight
Shall fill heaven's sounding courts with praise,
And wide diffuse the golden blaze
Of everlasting light.

The father shining on His throne,
The glorious, co-eternal Son,
The Spirit one and seven,
Conspire our rapture to complete,
And lo! we fall before His feet,
And silence heightens heaven.

What incantation—and what a noble climax!

Then Charles Wesley had the power of great masters of language in the terse, sententious saying, the haunting phrase, the compact antithetical expression. Instances are innumerable. What a body of divinity there is in the single compressed line:

He breaks the power of cancelled sin.

Or take the following descriptive phrases, selected from one only of his invitatory hymns, 'Sinners, obey the gospel word':

The plenitude of gospel grace.

The seeing eye, the feeling sense,
The mystic joys of penitence.

The godly grief, the pleasing smart,
The melting of a broken heart.

The guiltless shame, the sweet distress,
The unutterable tenderness.

The speechless awe that dares not move
And all the silent heaven of love.

A few verses, casually selected out of hundreds more, further illustrate Charles Wesley's powers of word and phrase: his gift for fixing 'bees in amber': of giving permanent expression to a fleeting emotion:

'Tis worse than death my God to love
And not my God alone.

Settle and fix my wavering soul
With all Thy weight of love.

Take this poor fluttering soul to rest,
And lodge it, Saviour, in Thy breast.

Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names, and sects, and parties fall:
Thou, O Christ, art all in all.

The ruins of my soul repair
And make my heart a house of prayer.

Thou hatest all iniquity,
But nothing Thou hast made.

One other notable literary gift must be mentioned—his power of weaving into a unity a variety of symbols and suggestions and producing a moving and beautiful figure. One instance may be cited ; at the conclusion of his great paraphrase of the litany, in his hymn on the passion of Christ, he says :

> Oh, let me kiss Thy bleeding feet,
> And bathe and wash them with my tears !
> The story of Thy love repeat
> In every drooping sinner's ears.

The figure suggests the Magdalen in the house of Simon the Pharisee, a penitent and loving soul, and the penitent Charles Wesley at the cross, expressing his penitence by her loving deed, and inspired like her for love's sake to be a great proclaimer of a love so great.

It has often been said that the literary and artistic results of the Evangelical Revival have been small, but Charles Wesley's hymns do much to neutralize this criticism. They did for early Methodism what Giotto's pictures did for the Franciscan Movement—they gave an artistic expression of enduring character to a great gospel. The joy of the early Methodists was not unlike the joy of the early Franciscans, and something of the same *naïveté* is to be found in the frescoes of the Church of San Francisco at Assisi and in some of the hymns of Charles Wesley. Who but a Charles Wesley would have thought of setting the solemn theme of the Crucifixion to a jig ? And yet,

> O Jesus, my hope,
> For me offered up,
> Who with clamour pursued Thee to Calvary's top,

is the very metre Wesley loved to use for his most exuberant hymns. There is a fresco of the Giotto school at Assisi of the Crucifixion where the three Marys at the cross are none of them sorrowful ; the mother is a dignified woman, proud

of her son, and the other two are rejoicing. Evangelical revivals will always glory in the Cross, because they know that the crucified is risen. And the joy of men with such an experience has a deeper influence on art, whether pictorial or literary, than has been understood. The hymns of Charles Wesley were the literary medium of the Methodists, they dance and sing, and the incantation of their language has cast a spell over the hearts and imaginations of millions for two centuries.

There is another side to the literary value of the hymns—the side of scholarship. Many of the hymns were the rapidly written expression of a fleeting mood, but many were carefully studied. Charles Wesley was a good classical scholar and a well-read man. Some of his hymns borrowed images from contemporary English literature, from the classics, and from the ecclesiastical writings of the Early Church. The best treatment of this subject is the learned little book of the Rev. Henry Bett. One instance of Charles Wesley's use of a contemporary poet may be quoted from its pages.

The hymn

> Love Divine, all loves excelling,
> Joy of heaven to earth come down;
> Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,
> All Thy faithful mercies crown,

owes both its trochaic metre and the form of its first line to the 'Song of Venus' in Dryden's *King Arthur*:

> Fairest isle, all isles excelling,
> Seat of pleasures and of loves,
> Venus here will choose her dwelling
> And forsake her Cyprian groves.

It is interesting to notice how he uses and glorifies the phrase of another poet. Cowley wrote:

And words our ill-drawn pictures scorn,
When we, by a foolish figure, say,
Behold an old man dead, then they
Speak properly, and say, Behold
A man-child born!

Charles Wesley writes:

When from flesh the spirit freed
Hastens homeward to return,
Mortals cry, A man is dead!
Angels sing, A child is born!

'It has been rightly said that one of the great charms of Milton is the "implicit lore" of his verse—the amount of scholarship that is held in solution in his stately lines. There is a similar charm in the verse of the Wesleys: one is always finding fresh evidence embedded in the hymns, of their wide reading and exact knowledge. These spiritual songs, like Prospero's isle, are full of Echoes.'[1]

[1] Bett: *Hymns of Methodism in their Literary Relation*, p. 101.

## XXIV

## THE HYMNS AS HISTORY

THE hymns of Charles Wesley are a good contemporary commentary on the history of Methodism—and not the least so because they are to only a negligible extent deliberately historical. But they are vivid and picturesque, and succeed by the magic of their incantation in conjuring up the past. They make Methodist history live. They interpret the *Journal.* Many of these verses are little vignettes of early Methodism.

Some one argued once that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was the best album of seventeenth-century men and women, and that many of the characters were actual portraits—for instance, Judge Hate-good is Judge Jeffreys. The life dress habit and speech of that century are immortalized by John Bunyan. To a less extent Wesley's hymns do a similar service for early Methodism. They do not picture actual men and women—lyric poetry could not do that—but they help us to visualize them as they inspire us to think of their struggle and victories. Many of the hymns rose out of particular events in early Methodist history, and reproduce for us the history that gave them birth.

' The Conversion ' is sung in scores of them. ' The brand plucked from eternal fire ' is a figure recurring a number of times, and that always suggests Epworth. But the story is told, not only in the hymns written under its impulse, but by anniversary lyrics, and by frequent allusions. That central experience was so fundamental to everything that there was no limit to its repetition. A chief factor of Charles Wesley's Evangelical conversion was his reading

Luther's comment on 'Who loved me and gave Himself for me,' in which the great reformer emphasizes and reiterates the words 'For me, for me.' One of the hymns Wesley wrote at the time keeps that incident alive—and also reminds us of the great succession of Paul, Luther, Wesley—in the words:

> O filial Deity
> Accept my *new-born* cry!
> See the travail of Thy soul,
> Saviour, and be satisfied;
> Take me now, possess me whole,
> Who *for me, for me*, hast died!

Can a well-instructed Methodist sing,

> See how great a flame aspires

without calling to mind the strangely warmed heart of John Wesley—the kindling of a great fire by a spark of grace? No better figure of the rapid growth of Methodism could have been found than the spreading fire.

What pictures, too, we get of the field preaching! The great hymn of invitation,

> All ye that pass by,
> To Jesus draw nigh:
> To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?

was obviously meant for the man in the street. One sees those surging throngs of hard-faced men and women, crowding to see a gentleman and clergyman, neat and dignified, standing in the open air and preaching. A man of Wesley's type arriving in an English village even to-day would arouse attention, for he was very different from the ordinary out-of-doors speaker, but in his day such 'enthusiasm' on the part of the Fellow of an Oxford college was unthinkable. The calm, firm voice announces the hymn and starts the tune. How startled the hearers must have

been, who had heard no religious singing but psalms droned out unintelligently in church, to hear:

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast,
Let every soul be Jesu's guest;
Ye need not one be left behind,
For God hath bidden all mankind.

Sent by my Lord, on *you* I call;
The invitation is to all:
Come, all the world; come, sinner, thou!
All things in Christ are ready now.

*My* message as from God receive,
Ye all may come to Christ and live;
O let His love your hearts constrain,
Nor suffer Him to die in vain.

The amazing novelty of such a hymn and such an appeal is perhaps difficult to realize to-day, but to visualize that open-air scene is to see Methodism in the making.

And what was their message—the message they were always delivering? Was it not the answer to the question of one of the hymns?

How can a sinner know
His sins on earth forgiven?
How can my gracious Saviour show
My name inscribed in heaven?

The evidence of the Spirit's witness, of the changed mind of the softened temper, of the spirit of obedience to Christ, are recited in the hymn, but most of all the overwhelming convictions inflaming the Methodist, and convincing the pagans of the day, are contained in the verse:

What we have felt and seen
With confidence we tell,
And publish to the sons of men
The signs infallible.

And in the splendid lyrical outburst

> Exults our rising soul,
> Disburdened of her load,
> And swells unutterably full
> Of glory and of God.

The glowing message, the profound conviction, the joyous confidence of these men, melt the hardness and indifference of the crowds. And do not their verses paint pictures of those early days so graphic that they can never be blotted out?

What sort of men were these early Methodists? They were poor, ignorant, and despised, treated by the great and the respectable classes with contempt as ignorant fanatics. But what did they care? They had a few shillings a week for their pockets, but unsearchable riches in their hearts. Their dignity was such that they considered themselves above millionaires and monarchs because of their high birth —the new birth.

In the hymn:

> Ye simple souls, that stray,

Wesley sums up what the world thinks of the Methodist:

> Madness and misery
> Ye count our life beneath,
> And nothing great can see
> Or glorious in our death;
> As born to suffer and to grieve,
> Beneath your feet we lie,
> And utterly contemned we live,
> And unlamented die.

And then turns round and sings of what the Methodists think of themselves, boasting the greatness of their dignity, wealth, society, dress, and royalty, and mean every word

T

of it—these people whose wages averaged about eight shillings a week.

So wretched and obscure,
The men whom ye despise,
So foolish, weak, and poor,
Above your scorn we rise:
Our conscience in the Holy Ghost
Can witness better things;
For He, whose blood is all our boast,
Hath made us priests and kings.

Are they despised for being poor, or being sour? They reply:

Riches unsearchable
In Jesu's love we know,
And pleasures from the well
Of life, our souls o'erflow.

Did people talk of their low associations, like the aristocratic lady who said they were 'the common worms that crawled the ground'?

If so, the worm turned to some purpose.

Angels our servants are,
And keep in all our ways,
And in their watchful hands they bear
The sacred sons of grace;

Unto that heavenly bliss
They all our steps attend,
And God Himself our Father is,
And Jesus is our friend.

Were they criticized because their clothes were poor and shabby?

With Him we walk in white,
We in His image shine,
Our robes are robes of glorious light,
Our righteousness divine.

Did people despise them for being low born? What cared they? Think of the sublime audacity of these despised men—they really think they have got something better than gold and learning and royalty, and actually shout:

> On all the kings of earth,
> With pity we look down,
> And claim, in virtue of *our birth*,
> A never-fading crown.

In the earliest version it was written 'Grovelling kings of earth,' and that would be strong even for a Republican, but an early Methodist was so sure of the exalted character of the new birth, and that he was an heir of Almighty God, that he sang it and meant what he said. It is not difficult to understand that men with such a conviction were unconquerable.

And then their fellowship, their comradeship in Christ. They needed some other men to whom they could tell their story. Methodism is a religion of expression. It declares itself from the housetops. It has been criticized for its lack of reticence and quietness. Well, if that be an accusation, it is true; Methodism is the religion of a thousand singing tongues. It must talk. Its fellowship is through conversation.

> My heart is full of Christ, and longs
> Its glorious matter to declare.

It was a religion with something to say, and the subjects of it could not be silent. It was a social religion. Nothing is more characteristic of it than its fellowship. No true Methodist ever wanted to go to heaven by himself alone. He did not think of men crossing the river one by one, as Bunyan described them. He sang:

> Part of the *host* have crossed the flood,
> And part are crossing now.

It was a society from the first. And those early meetings of men communicating their joy to one another had no parallels since apostolic times. No picture is more graphic than Charles Wesley's great fellowship hymn, palpitating with the joy of holy friendship, as it does, and anticipating unspeakable joys in another world of fellowship unbroken.

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
  Who joins us by His grace,
And bids us, each to each restored,
  Together seek His face.

The gift which He on one bestows,
  We all delight to prove;
The grace through every vessel flows,
  In purest streams of love.

Even now we think and speak the same,
  And cordially agree;
Concentred all, through Jesu's name,
  In perfect harmony.

And if our fellowship below
  In Jesus be so sweet,
What heights of rapture shall we know
  When round His throne we meet!

These verses present a perfect picture of a Methodist class meeting of early days. Most Methodists of the present (and perhaps all of the future) need such a hymn to enable them to visualize the social joys of Methodist fellowship. It is to be hoped that the gladness of it may even yet recreate new forms of the class meeting in the days to come, for fellowship is a vital characteristic of genuine Methodism.

Of the many books of poems and hymns the Wesleys published, none are so valuable as history, read in conjunction with the *Journal*, as that of 1739, which contained the great 'Conversion' hymns, and that of 1740. The inwardness of early Methodism is revealed, not only by

the hymns of the 1739 publication, but by John Wesley's important preface on Methodism and mysticism; but the hymns which are the best 'historical vignettes' of the early Methodists are those of the later volume. The Revival has begun, and now, in its early days, we get glimpses of the movement, with the dew of the morning upon it. We see the Kingswood colliers, savages who had been tamed by the gospel; we are made conscious of opposition; of the threatening and dangerous mobs; and of the calm strength of the great evangelists unmoved by their fury. We hear the rumble of ancient controversies, drowned to-day by the songs of Charles Wesley; we get one glimpse of John Wesley starting out on an itinerating journey, and perhaps more of Charles Wesley, for his hymns are often autobiography.

The newly converted Kingswood colliers were taught to sing:

> Suffice that for the season past
> Hell's horrid language filled our tongues,
> We all Thy words behind us cast,
> And loudly sang the drunkard's songs.
>
> But, oh the power of grace divine!
> In hymns we now our voices raise,
> Loudly in strange hosannas join,
> And blasphemies are turned to praise.

The Wesleys were often in danger of their lives, and many times believed themselves miraculously delivered from death. The worst mobs they had to face gathered a few years later, but Charles Wesley had some dreadful experiences in 1739, particularly in Bristol. His experiences may be discovered in the thrilling verses of:

> Earth, rejoice, our Lord is King.

He wrote the hymn for singing 'In Tumults.' And one can picture the singing of it in the open air, as brick-bats were flying, and the storm beat about one man standing

firm and quiet as a rock, resisting the surges which crash upon it. John and Charles Wesley were both men of imperturbable courage in the hour of danger. We can see them encouraging their followers in the midst of the tumult to sing :

Though the sons of night blaspheme,
More there are with us than them ;
God with us, we cannot fear ;
Fear, ye fiends, for Christ is here !

Lo ! to faith's enlightened sight
All the mountain flames with light ;
Hell is nigh, but God is nigher,
Circling us with hosts of fire.

The splendid defiance of these words would not be without their effect on the eighteenth-century mob, which, notwithstanding its coarseness, was superstitious.

But ' In Tumults,' when the forces of evil seemed to gain an upper hand, and the little frightened societies met together, what new encouragement would inspire them as they sing :

Hell is nigh, but God is nigher,
Circling us with hosts of fire.

Here is a little picture of the great equestrian, for it was probably John and not Charles Wesley who wrote the hymn, one of the finest of them all, entitled ' On a Journey.'

Talk with me, Lord : Thyself reveal
While here o'er *earth I rove.*

The hymn is used to-day by meditative persons in quiet hours, but it was first of all the roving itinerant's prayer for an unseen companion, and for the joy of communion in his long, lonely journeys.

Speak to my heart, and let me feel
The kindling of Thy love.

No one can get a true view of early Methodism without some realization of how large a part controversy on vital questions played in it. The rejection of the Moravian extravagances of Molther at Fetter Lane, and the protests against the Calvinistic decrees, made much trouble in the early Societies, but they liberated the converts of the Wesleys from the exaggerations and dangers of their emotional experiences—in a word, from 'enthusiasm' on the one hand, and made it plain that the gospel of universal salvation was the fundamental fact of their great crusade on the other.

Molther's doctrine of stillness—an extravagant perversion of Luther's teaching—created unhappiness and trouble in the Society at Fetter Lane. Molther meant by 'stillness' that salvation by faith *only* involved no use of the means of grace, of Scripture reading, of sacraments, or even of good works of charity, until the soul experienced salvation. It was to be still—even from all good works—till it knew God. Wesley repudiated this absurd doctrine, and took such people as would follow him to the Foundery, and there created his own Society.

Charles Wesley's poem, 'The Means of Grace,' puts the Methodist case.

> Still for Thy loving kindness, Lord,
> I in Thy temple wait;
> I look to find Thee in Thy Word,
> Or at Thy table meet.
>
> Here, *in Thine own appointed ways*,
> I wait to learn Thy will;
> Silent I stand before Thy face,
> And hear Thee say, 'Be still!'

None of the controversies have left so vivid an impression on the hymns of Charles Wesley as those which rose out of the Calvinistic discussions. His ironical hymns on the

' Decrees ' expressed savage indignation in biting words, and they partly explain the Calvinistic abuse of the Wesleys. So unanswerable were Charles Wesley's hymns on Calvinism that the only possible reply was abuse ! They are dealt with in Chapter VIII., but two additional stanzas may be fittingly quoted here :

Mercy I sing, transporting sound,
The joy of earth and heaven !
Mercy, by every sinner found,
Who takes what God hath given.

Thou canst not mock the sons of men ;
Invite us to draw nigh,
Offer Thy grace to all, and then
Thy grace to most deny.

These hymns lift the curtain from the past, and help us to understand the fiery zeal with which the Wesleys met the men who might have ruined their work. The calm and reasonable statements of John Wesley, and his strong action when necessary, would have certainly counted, but these hymns, in which the positive gospel was sung with such inimitable force and fervour, had an indescribable influence on the minds of those who sang them. The hymns help us to picture the protagonists.

The hymns bring all sorts of other institutions and men of those early days to memory, so we catch glimpses of early love-feasts, and read the splendid hymns Charles Wesley wrote for them ; and the solidarity of fellowship so necessary in the days when the Societies were forming is sublimely taught and sung by a long series of verses on the communion of saints. One sees the Society growing—there is already a hymn to be sung on the admission of a new member :

Welcome from earth !—Lo ! the right hand
Of fellowship to thee we give.

And the greatest popular hymn of all, which is all that many people think of when they think of Charles Wesley :

Jesu, Lover of my soul,

is in the 1740 volume.

This volume indicates the surprising solidity of the Methodist movement within one year of its inception ; its characteristic institutions were alive and flourishing, and the hymns show graphically that the religious type has not changed ; perhaps the hymns are responsible for its fixity. Most of the things which matter in Methodism were already born, but we catch no glimpse of the Methodist preacher. And yet there never was a more heroic figure than Wesley's lay helper, but he was to come later. What troubles these men endured. They were despised as the Wesleys never were ; scornfully categorized as ' a ragged legion of preaching hucksters, tricksters, scavengers, barbers, and draymen.' Nothing is more moving than the hymn which they used to sing at the opening of Conference, and which is sung to this day :

And are we yet alive,
And see each other's face ?
Glory and praise to Jesus give
For His redeeming grace !

What troubles have we seen,
What conflicts have we passed,
Fightings without, and fears within,
Since we assembled last !

But out of all the Lord
Hath brought us by His love ;
And still He doth His help afford
And hides our life above.

It takes little imagination to realize the emotion with which these words must have been sung by men who ' in

journeyings oft were in perils oft'; who knew the daily pinch of poverty, and had continually to contend with mobs and endure countless troubles, and yet sang with joy:

> Then let us make our boast
> Of His redeeming power.

It was not till the 1749 book that Charles Wesley published his hymns for preachers, and then he published many both for clergy and lay preachers. Some are the results of his own preaching, and several of his most famous hymns of invitation were his comment on services for colliers conducted by himself at Newcastle and Kingswood and Leicester. The following verses originated in that way:

> Ye neighbours and friends of Jesus draw near:
> His love condescends by titles so dear
> To call and invite you His triumph to prove,
> And freely delight you in Jesus's love.

And at Portland, amongst the stone-workers, he wrote:

> Strike with the hammer of Thy word,
> And break these hearts of stone.

One of his hymns for a lay preacher is perhaps the finest hymn of its kind in the language. From it are extracted the verses still sung by us, beginning

> Give me the faith which can remove,
> And sink the mountain to a plain,

and concluding with the much-quoted words:

> Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
> With boundless charity divine!
> So shall I all my strength exert,
> And love them with a zeal like Thine;
> And lead them to Thy open side,
> The sheep for whom their Shepherd died.

A knowledge of Charles Wesley's hymns is essential to any true understanding of Methodist history. An accurate account of external events is not necessarily true history. The Methodism of the past was not a corpse, but a living body. Nothing gave it such vivid social life as the hymns of Charles Wesley.

## XXV

## THE HYMNS AS RELIGION

'THAT which is of infinitely more moment than the spirit of poetry,' says John Wesley, 'is the spirit of piety.'

That opinion Charles Wesley shared. So clear is this that an examination of Wesley's hymns merely as literature or history is very difficult, because they are always primarily religion, and the fervid religion of a flaming evangelist. The hymn-book of 1780 was framed by John Wesley, and the hymns were carefully arranged by that systematic hand. 'The hymns,' he writes, 'are not carelessly jumbled together, but carefully ranged under proper hands, according to the experience of real Christians. So that the book is in effect a body of experimental and practical divinity.' A study of that arrangement reveals as well as any of John Wesley's pamphlets on Methodism the whole Methodist conception of religion.

Here is the original table of contents:

### THE CONTENTS

PART I

*Containing Introductory Hymns*

SECTION

I. Exhorting and beseeching to return to God

II. Describing

(1) The pleasantness of Religion
(2) The goodness of God
(3) Death
(4) Judgement
(5) Heaven
(6) Hell

III. Praying for a Blessing

PART II

SECTION
I. Describing Formal Religion
II. Describing Inward Religion

PART III

SECTION
I. Praying for Repentance
II. For mourners convinced of sin
III. For mourners brought to the birth
IV. Convinced of Backsliding
V. Recovered

PART IV

SECTION
I. For Believers Rejoicing
II. For Believers Fighting
III. For Believers Praying
IV. For Believers Watching
V. For Believers Working
VI. For Believers Suffering
VII. For Believers Groaning for Redemption
VIII. For Believers Brought to the Birth
IX. For Believers Saved
X. For Believers Interceding for the World

PART V

SECTION
I. For the Society Meeting
II. For the Society Giving Thanks
III. For the Society Praying
IV. For the Society Parting

John Wesley wrote nothing which, properly understood, explains his conception of evangelical religion more clearly than this striking table of contents. It begins with an invitation to all men to return to God. So the first note struck is the missionary note. Missionary activity was the primary impulse of the Evangelical Revival. The invitation is based on well-reasoned grounds. ' The pleasantness of Religion ; the Goodness of God ' (the hymns demonstrating this are hymns about the Cross, which displays God's love).

The facts of death, heaven, hell, and judgement are additional grounds for this urgent invitation. At the very end of Part I. is a section containing three hymns, praying for a blessing, suitable for the commencement of an evening service.

Now why was that strange order adopted? Other Church hymn-books would begin with praises to God and prayers for blessing, and all this preliminary evangelism of the Wesleys would be relegated to an appendix entitled 'For Mission Services.' That difference of order indicates a vital innovation. The Evangelical Revival began in the open air, and, apparently, when the open-air exhortations concluded, preacher and people went to an indoor service, and a blessing was asked upon those who had come inside But let it never be forgotten Methodism began as evangelism in the open air. John Wesley by the order of his table of contents announces that fact to his contemporaries and to his spiritual progeny.

Now, when Wesley had gathered together out of the open air his strangely assorted congregation, he put before them the two types of religion known to him—outward and inward—and made it clear, through his hymns, that outward religion was worthless apart from religion of the heart. Of outward religion his congregation was made to sing :

> The world, the Christian world, convince
> Of damning unbelief ;
>
> The formalists confound, convert,
> And to Thy people join.

Of inward religion :

> Faith lends its realizing light,
> The clouds disperse, the shadows fly ;
> The Invisible appears in sight,
> And God is seen by mortal eye.

The third, fourth, and fifth parts of the book consist of hymns for those who are seeking inward religion. The third part for penitents seeking inward peace and God's pardon ; and the fourth for believers, rejoicing, fighting, praying, watching, working, suffering, groaning for full redemption, brought to the birth, saved, interceding for the world.

The hymns of the first four parts are individualistic in sentiment ; each soul sings them for itself without regard to the others ; they are personal, heart-searching hymns, or hymns of joy. The personal pronouns in them are ' I ' and ' me,' not ' we ' and ' us.' They were hymns of personal experience. Often the experience described was an actual experience of Charles Wesley. But, sung by others, it expressed or created the personal experience of those who sang it. This was a novelty in public worship. ' From the liturgical point of view the hymn of experience seems to violate the traditions, and to create a new standard of Church praise. Instead of a congregation uttering its corporate praise, we have a gathering of individuals conducting their private devotions in audible unison.'

In the fifth, and last part—for the Society meeting and parting—the hymns are distinctly corporate in character. ' We ' and ' our ' generally take the place of ' I ' and ' my.' The social hymns lack nothing of the rapture of the hymns of personal experience. They are hymns of corporate experience and aspiration, but of a society which meets together primarily to experience, rather than to adore.

Now such a scheme is a remarkable, though possibly unconscious, expression of the meaning of the Methodist Revival and the Methodist Societies. John Wesley did not mean it to be comprehensive of the whole praise of the Church. It must never be forgotten that his scheme of services had behind it the historic liturgies which he imposed as far as he was able on all the Methodists of his day. He regarded all his services as supplementary to regular Church services. But no one can read his table of contents of the

1780 collection of hymns without realizing what the Evangelical Revival meant for him, and what a vitalizing, creative force the hymns of his brother were.[1]

It would take a large volume to expound the religion of these hymns. They sound the depths and scale the heights of human experience, and they declare the glories, particularly the redemptive glories, of the grace of God. Perhaps some conception of their range and depth may be realized if we classify a few of them rather differently and call them ' A Methodist's Guide-book for life.' For whatever the singer of these hymns did, whether his occupation was secular or sacred, and wherever he sojourned, whatever life experiences or soul experiences he underwent, he could find in the hymn-book a chart of life, and discover some song to help him as he journeyed on through the world. He, of course, was a pilgrim, and sang :

> Through Thee, who all our sins hast borne,
> Freely and graciously forgiven,
> With *songs* to Zion we return,
> Contending for our native heaven ;
> That palace of our glorious King,
> We find it nearer while we *sing*.

The hymn-book is a Methodist's guide-book for life—a map for a man who had the form and sought the power of godliness. He was a man as well as a Christian. He had home and wife and family, and daily work and companions and leisure. He ate and drank and spent and saved like other men. He had troubles and difficulties to face. He was born to die. He needed guidance in every sphere of life, and in the Methodist hymn-book he found it. Charles Wesley provided him with a ' Hymnal Companion ' for every day, and most of all for Sunday. As a Methodist of the heroic period, his treasures were laid up in heaven ; he was a pilgrim, and craved, above all, for the heavenly experience ;

[1] *N. H. M.*, Introduction.

he breathed the air of heavenly places, and they too were mapped out for him. He never forgot that his citizenship was in heaven.

Thither in all our thoughts we tend,
And still with loving eyes look up,
Our hearts and prayers before we send,
Our ready scouts of faith and hope,
Who bring us news of Zion near,
We soon shall see the towers appear.

Even now we taste the pleasures there,
A cloud of spicy odours comes,
Soft wafted through the balmy air,
Sweeter than Araby's perfumes:
From Zion's top the breezes blow,
And cheer us in the vales below.[1]

For the Methodist, as he woke up in the morning, Charles Wesley wrote one of his greatest hymns, 'Christ, whose glory fills the skies':

Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by Thee;
Joyless is the day's return,
Till Thy mercy's beams I see,
Till Thou inward light impart,
Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine;
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me Radiancy divine;
Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more Thyself display
Shining to the perfect day.

With such a hymn on his lips he could proceed happy to breakfast, and find himself provided with a score or more of graces with which to bless his food in song, and as many thanksgivings after meat with which to praise his God.

[1] Omitted verses in 'Leader of faithful souls, and Guide.'

Some people have thought that the Wesleys had nothing to say about the daily toil. But in one of the earliest books they show that they had not forgotten that a working man, however much he be a sinner saved, needs guidance in his daily work, and a hymn was written to be sung at work.

Son of the Carpenter, receive
  This humble work of mine;
Worth to my meanest labour give,
  By joining it to Thine.

Servant of all, to toil for man
  Thou wouldst not, Lord, refuse:
Thy Majesty did not disdain
  To be employed for us.

Careless through outward cares I go,
  From all distraction free;
My hands are but engaged below,
  My heart is still with Thee.[1]

If he was not a carpenter, another hymn was provided for him:

Summoned my labour to renew,
  And glad to act my part,
Lord, in Thy name my work I do,
  And with a single heart.

If he fell into temptation, a special hymn had been written for the tempted, perhaps to him the sweetest of all:

Other refuge have I none,
  Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
  Still support and comfort me.

And when he got home at the end of the day, other hymns were there to guide him.

The children were sent to bed singing:

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child.

[1] All hymns quoted which are not in the Methodist hymn-book or only in it in part are to be found in the *Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, edited by Dr. George Osborn, 1868.

If he had leisure, the hymn-book was ready for him:

When quiet in my house I sit,
Thy book be my companion still.

And there was a hymn very sacred to the old Methodists with which they sang themselves to sleep:

How do Thy mercies close me round!
For ever be Thy name adored.

Safe in Thy arms I lay me down,
Thy everlasting arms of love.

Wherefore in confidence I close
My eyes, for Thine are open still,
My spirit, lull'd in calm repose,
Waits for the counsels of Thy will.

But a man had to face the troubles of life. Were there ever such hymns of comfort?

Peace, doubting heart! my God's I am:
Who formed me man, forbids my fear.

And if the struggle was too severe for ordinary man, he was reminded how clouds were the messengers of God, and lightnings his angels—and he sang:

The rougher our way,
The shorter our stay;
The tempests that rise
Shall gloriously hurry our souls to the skies.

The fiercer the blast,
The sooner 'tis past;
The troubles that come
Shall come to our rescue and hasten us home.

There was nothing in the life of a Methodist he could think of for which Charles Wesley did not provide a hymn.

If you were sick, he provided you something to sing.[1] There was a hymn for one about to take his medicine.[1]

Hail, great Physician of mankind,
Jesus, Thou art from every ill.
Health in Thine only name we find,
Thy name doth in the medicine heal.

When you recovered, another hymn.[2]

If your child was sick,[3] he had a hymn ready for you, and, at the bedside of a dead child,[4] a beautiful hymn of resignation:

God forbids his longer stay,
God recalls the precious loan,
God hath taken him away,
From my bosom to His own;
Surely what He wills is best,
Happy in His will I rest.

And while he put hymns into the mouths of carpenters and working men, he did not forget the doctor. He wrote a hymn for a physician.[5]

The life of the home appealed to Charles Wesley, and he gives hymns to husbands and wives,[6] and hymns for mothers,[7] and hymns for children,[8] and wrote a hymn on the true use of music.[9]

Music, alas! too long has been
Pressed to obey the devil.[10]

Who, he asks, will deprive carnality of its grip of music,

Strip him of every moving strain,
Every melting measure,
Music in virtue's cause retain,
Rescue the holy pleasure?[11]

[1] *Poetical Works of J. and C. Wesley*, Vol. V., p. 74. [2] Ibid., p. 64.
[3] Ibid., p. 79. [4] Ibid., p. 80. [5] Ibid., p. 84. [6] Ibid., p. 403.
[7] Ibid., p. 393. [8] Ibid., p. 395. [9] Ibid., p. 397.
[10] Ibid., p. 397. [11] Ibid., p. 397.

When you called at a house, Charles Wesley was there before you with a hymn for you to sing, and when you left he provided another, and when you were hurried in business there was another hymn ready to help you through. Nothing can be more obvious than that Methodism was a singing religion, and its songs touched life at every point. So Methodists summed up all their songs in their great pilgrim hymn :

> With songs to Zion we return,
> Contending for our native heaven.

One hymn was a great favourite with the early Methodist preachers. Few more heroic souls have ever lived than they. Nothing but their great experience, and their strong sense of

> 'Tis worth living for, this,
> To administer bliss
> And salvation in Jesus's name,

could have enabled them to endure. And the stanza that most often occurs in their autobiographies is very quaint, and nearer to doggerel perhaps than John Wesley would have admitted, but triumphant in spirit.

> I rode on the sky,
> (Freely justified I !)
> Nor envied Elijah his seat ;
> My soul mounted higher
> In a chariot of fire,
> And the moon it was under my feet.

But with such a faith these Methodist saints and heroes fought the good fight and have inherited the crown of life. For their more purely religious life, although the distinctions between secular and sacred were thin, they had a guide-book in Wesley's hymns, which interpreted every mood and did not fail to direct their feet in the way of life.

The summary of it is the table of contents of the hymn-book.

What a wealth of thought, images, and inspiration enriched these ' believers ' as they entered into one or other of the groups of fighting, working, praying, groaning, or interceding men. It is impossible to track them in their varying experiences, their relapses, their penitence, their victories, their ecstasies of love and joy as one or other of the hymns came to their memories, like a living word of God. But never were Christians better provided for than the humble poor gathered together in early Methodism, who were compassed about with songs of deliverance. Charles Wesley wrote many hymns which in certain moods one is inclined to call his greatest. One of them contains in its thirty-two lines the best summary of what is meant by the Imitation of Christ in the English language. The balance between his prayer life and his practical life is exquisitely poised. It sets forth the ideal of Christian living in a series of terse but poetical verses. Outside Methodism it is surprisingly unappreciated. I set it down at full length, because it is in itself a guide-book to conduct :

Holy Lamb, who Thee confess,
Followers of Thy holiness,
Thee they ever keep in view,
Ever ask, What shall we do?
Governed by Thy only will,
All Thy words we would fulfil,
Would in all Thy footsteps go,
Walk as Jesus walked below.

While Thou didst on earth appear,
Servant to Thy servants here,
Mindful of Thy place above,
All Thy life was prayer and love.
Such our whole employment be,
Works of faith and charity;
Works of love on man bestowed,
Secret intercourse with God.

Early in the temple met,
Let us still our Saviour greet;
Nightly to the mount repair,
Join our praying Pattern there.
There by wrestling faith obtain
Power to work for God again,
Power His image to retrieve,
Power, like Thee, our Lord, to live.

Vessels, instruments of grace,
Pass we thus our happy days
'Twixt the mount and multitude,
Doing or receiving good;
Glad to pray and labour on,
Till our earthly course is run,
Till we, on the sacred tree,
Bow the head and die like Thee.

The hymns treated in this book have illustrated principally the common Methodist experience, and few have been quoted which fathom the deeps of Charles Wesley's thought. John Wesley complained of the taint of mysticism in some of his brother's hymns. The practical temper of that man of great common sense was admirable, but it may be that his insistence on a sharp-edged and regulated life found little room for certain delicate and sensitive souls, and perhaps his reaction against mysticism, good and sound as it was on the whole, went to unreasonable extremes. Wesley did not publish ' Jesu, Lover of my soul ' in his 1780 collection of hymns because of his dislike of the amorous mystical suggestion of its early lines, and he disliked some of his brother's hymns on Christian perfection on similar grounds. Was not Charles's instinct the truer and deeper, even when one admits the dangers of mysticism? Some of Charles Wesley's quiet, brooding, affectionate, mystical hymns are among the gems of his collection, and have been of the greatest value to souls less masculine, it may be, than John Wesley's, but not less sensitive. Take, for instance:

Thou Shepherd of Israel, and mine,
The joy and desire of my heart,
For closer communion I pine,
I long to reside where Thou art:

Ah! show me that happiest place,
The place of Thy people's abode,
Where saints in an ecstacy gaze,
And hang on a crucified God;

'Tis there, with the lambs of Thy flock,
There only, I covet to rest,
To lie at the foot of the rock,
Or rise to be hid in Thy breast;
'Tis there I would always abide,
And never a moment depart,
Concealed in the cleft of Thy side,
Eternally hid in Thy heart.

That is pure mysticism; it is not suitable for the singing of a normal congregation, but the hymns were for reading as well as singing, and Methodism has been greatly enriched by the tender yearnings of this hymn.

And perhaps it was well that the Methodist should sometimes forget the shouts and hallelujahs of his first emotional transport, and think quietly.

Open, Lord, my inward ear,
And bid my heart rejoice;
Bid my quiet spirit hear
Thy comfortable voice;
Never in the whirlwind found
Or where earthquakes rock the place,
Still and silent is the sound,
The whisper of Thy grace.

No fair account of Methodist hymnody is given that fails to recall the hymns of quiet communion and thought, strengthening the soul in secret places, far away from open-air services and lively meetings of the Society. The mystical hymns of Charles Wesley would be dangerous if he had

written nothing else; but if he had written nothing but the hymns of challenge, battle, and victory, many quiet souls to which he has spoken would have been impoverished.

This illustrates only one side of the inner life of which he wrote so much; his hymns of penitence for unfaithfulness are amongst the most heart-searching, and his songs of perfect love, and the search for it, amongst the most inspiring ever written; but to analyse them all would be to write a complete compendium of theology, for John is right in calling the hymn-book 'a body of practical divinity.'

One early hymn of his, not now in the hymn-books, reveals the sin which left him desolate. The third verse expresses his desperate condition:

Base wretch that I am!
With sorrow and shame
The sin I confess
Which robbed me of all my sweet comfort and peace.

A number of penitential lines analyse the causes of his fall and his despair. And he concludes with four verses which one would not wish should perish:

Ah! what shall I do?
He only must show,
Whose pity can find
A cause in Himself to be gracious and kind.

Whose mercies exceed
My offences, and plead
Unwearied for me;
Whose love is a boundless and bottomless sea.

My refuge is this
Unexhausted abyss;
Forsaken of all,
Lord, into Thy ocean of mercy I fall.

Here, Jesu, am I
Determined to lie,
Thy goodness to prove,
And if I am lost, to be lost in Thy love.

It should also be remembered that there are a number of Charles Wesley's hymns which are not subjective or experimental in character, although they were written through the medium of his experiencing temperament—I mean the great festival hymns of the Church. While they never achieved the objective, statuesque character of Samuel Wesley's

Behold the Saviour of mankind,

they do set forth the glory of Christ.

Hymns like :

Hark ! how all the welkin rings,
Christ the Lord is risen to-day,
Hail the day that sees Him rise,

are great Christian classics, and perhaps the three best hymns in the language for the three great festivals of the Church they celebrate.

But the hymns that give most surprise to modern writers on Methodism are Charles Wesley's sacramental hymns. John and Charles Wesley published 166 of them along with Dr. Brevint's book on the Eucharist, of which they were an illustration, and bound up with them also Thomas à Kempis's *Companion to the Altar*. Their number, their popularity—ten editions were published—and their advanced sacramental teaching contrast sharply with open-air evangelism and the early meetings of the Methodist Societies. To many people to this day they seem ' a strange intrusion into the body of experimental hymnody.'[1] Writers whose object is to show that the Wesleys ceased to be High Churchmen after 1739 are inclined to ignore them ; the first edition of these hymns was published in 1745, and republished during the whole of Wesley's lifetime and after his death. No writer understands the meaning of the Evangelical Revival who cannot place these hymns—they are an integral part of the Revival. The far-reaching

[1] Benson : *The English Hymn*, p. 251.

results of the sacramentalism of the Wesleys have been considered in a former section of this book, but the hymns whereby Methodists interpreted Holy Communion, and prepared themselves for it, must be noted in any writing on Methodist hymnody.[1]

Cardinal Newman, in his *Grammar of Assent*, wrote the following memorable words :

'Let us consider, too, how differently young and old are affected by the words of some classic author, such as Homer or Horace.

'Passages, which to a boy are but rhetorical commonplaces, neither better nor worse than a hundred others which any clever writer might supply, which he gets by heart and thinks very fine, and imitates, as he thinks successfully, in his own flowing versification, at length come home to him, when long years have passed, and he has had experience of life, and pierce him as if he had never before known them, with their sad earnestness and vivid exactness. Then he comes to understand how it is that lines, the birth of some chance morning or evening at an Ionian festival, or among the Sabine hills, have lasted generation after generation, for thousands of years, with a power over the mind, and a charm, which the current literature of his own day, with all its obvious advantages, is utterly unable to rival.'

The early Methodists did not enjoy a classical education ; the only poetical writings they knew were the hymns of Charles Wesley. But those hymns soaked into their hearts, fired their imagination, and guided their feet. They repeated them in the hour and article of death. Even Robert Southey bore witness to that. Life, with its fleeting emotions, stern problems, and sorrowful discipline, interpreted in its successive stages the hymns they knew so well, and was in turn interpreted by them. The intellectual and spiritual value of this sacred literature to these illiterate men was incalculable, not because they were illiterate men,

[1] See Chapter XVI., pp. 182–6.

but because they were souls to whose deeps these deeps called not in vain.

We have spoken of the permanent influence of the Evangelical Revival in the realms of doctrine, religious and political history, and in the common-sense religion of ordinary men, but of all its values there is none more enriching and abiding than the great Wesleyan hymnody.

It is true that taste changes ; it is true that the spiritual problems of one age are not the spiritual problems of another. The dialect even of religious experience is not to-day identical with that of the eighteenth century. Some of the hymns have fallen into disuse ; others may, because their local colouring is not that of our own age, or will not be that of some future time ; but many of them will abide, inexhaustible treasuries of spiritual experience, and luminous interpretations of God and man. They cannot die, because they sing in magical language of the elemental matters of God and the human soul.

The Methodist of to-day may well join in the song which John Wesley seems to have thought the noblest of his brother's hymns—an opinion shared by several eminent literary men, as, for instance, Dr. Butler, the late Master of Trinity College, Cambridge—the great hymn of the Church militant and the Church triumphant. In it Methodists in this world and the other join together :

Let all the saints terrestrial sing,
With those to glory gone ;
For all the servants of our King,
In earth and heaven, are one.

One family we dwell in Him,
One Church, above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death :
One army of the living God,
To His command we bow ;
Part of His host have crossed the flood,
And part are crossing now.

# GENERAL STATISTICS OF METHODISM, 1927.

N.B.—These statistics are the latest procurable. The members in Junior Classes are not reckoned.

| Denomination. | Ministers. | Lay Preachers. | Church Members and Probationers. | Sunday Schools. | Officers and Teachers. | Sunday Scholars. | Churches, etc. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Wesleyan Methodists :** | | | | | | | |
| Great Britain .. .. .. .. .. .. | 2,500 | 19,024 | 519,510 | 7,321 | 120,215 | 825,604 | *8,600 |
| Ireland .. .. .. .. .. .. | 242 | 602 | 29,590 | 336 | 2,228 | 22,586 | 416 |
| Foreign Missions .. .. .. .. .. .. | 747 | 11,149 | 287,759 | 2,981 | 10,741 | 168,669 | 5,311 |
| French Conference .. .. .. .. .. | 26 | 63 | 1,757 | 25 | 85 | 693 | 55 |
| South African Conference .. .. .. .. | 282 | 5,942 | 169,583 | 1,000 | 3,295 | 45,777 | 4,674 |
| **Primitive Methodists** .. .. .. .. .. | 1,087 | 13,456 | 220,806 | 3,971 | 54,866 | 394,050 | 4,554 |
| **United Methodist Church** .. .. .. .. | 713 | 4,735 | 153,757 | 2,068 | 37,777 | 242,886 | 2,216 |
| **Wesleyan Reform Union** .. .. .. .. | 26 | 504 | 10,178 | 203 | 2,412 | 24,085 | 215 |
| **Independent Methodist Churches** .. .. .. | 388 | — | 10,502 | 165 | 3,243 | 24,563 | 165 |
| **Australasian Methodist Church** .. .. .. | 1,136 | 8,036 | 166,101 | 3,511 | 30,916 | 203,431 | 3,752 |
| **New Zealand Methodist Church**** .. .. .. | 190 | 816 | 29,425 | 465 | 3,121 | 31,632 | 1,030 |
| **United States :** | | | | | | | |
| Methodist Episcopal† .. .. .. .. .. | 20,905 | 14,556 | 5,152,236 | 17,248 | 407,182 | 4,217,372 | 28,656 |
| Methodist Episcopal, South .. .. .. .. | 8,304 | 5,264 | 2,602,316 | 16,346 | 172,760 | 2,014,788 | 17,540 |
| Methodist Prostestant .. .. .. .. .. | 1,134 | 377 | 188,878 | 1,988 | 17,495 | 180,071 | 2,257 |
| African Methodist Episcopal (coloured) .. .. | 7,000 | 6,330 | 698,029 | 7,200 | 29,996 | 320,000 | 7,500 |
| African Methodist Episcopal Zion (coloured) .. | 3,962 | — | 412,315 | 2,092 | 16,245 | 193,000 | 2,716 |
| Coloured Methodist Episcopal .. .. .. .. | 2,638 | — | 331,021 | 2,543 | 18,884 | 193,000 | 3,577 |
| Free Methodist .. .. .. .. .. .. | 1,200 | — | 40,251 | 1,280 | 10,150 | 68,945 | 1,260 |
| Wesleyan Methodist .. .. .. .. .. | 645 | 45 | 21,500 | 625 | 3,800 | 32,000 | 550 |
| Primitive Methodist .. .. .. .. .. | 80 | 75 | 11,905 | 102 | 1,524 | 14,781 | 102 |
| Congregational Methodist .. .. .. .. | 500 | — | 21,000 | 182 | 1,146 | 8,785 | 352 |
| New Congregational Methodist .. .. .. | 27 | — | 1,256 | 27 | 143 | 1,298 | 24 |
| Union American Methodist Episcopal (coloured) .. | 205 | 105 | 18,812 | 67 | 321 | 2,531 | 267 |
| African Union Methodist Protestant (coloured) .. | 260 | — | 3,750 | 49 | 441 | 3,088 | 58 |
| Reformed Zion Union Apostolic (coloured) .. .. | 79 | — | 10,000 | 36 | 212 | 1,508 | 58 |
| Reformed Methodist Union Episcopal (coloured) .. | 48 | — | 2,772 | 18 | 204 | 1,792 | 25 |
| British Methodist Episcopal (coloured) .. .. | 20 | 6 | 700 | 18 | 125 | — | 21 |
| African Methodist Protestant .. .. .. .. | 675 | — | 26,100 | — | — | — | 650 |
| African American Methodist Episcopal .. .. | 35 | — | 5,811 | 25 | — | 934 | 27 |
| **United Church of Canada** .. .. .. .. .. | 4,612 | 1,856 | 692,348 | 6,926 | 74,146 | 806,468 | 8,806 |
| **Japan Methodist Church** .. .. .. .. .. | 158 | 140 | 29,420 | 554 | — | 42,570 | 162 |
| Totals .. .. | 59,824 | 93,081 | 11,869,388 | 79,372 | 1,023,673 | 10,086,907 | 105,596 |

*Seating accommodation, 2,418,356. **These figures include the Solomon Islands Mission with 64 lay preachers, 4,791 members, 41 Sunday schools, 1,384 scholars and 122 churches and preaching places. †Methodism is also represented in several European countries by Conferences and Missions affiliated to the Methodist Episcopal Church of America, and their membership is included in the figures given above. The latest returns available are : Austria, 1,042 members ; Bulgaria, 757 ; Denmark, 4,201 ; Finland, 2,254 ; France, 1,094 ; Germany (North), 23,200 ; Germany (South), 18,054 ; Hungary, 692 ; Italy, 3,860 ; Jugo-Slavia, 1,440 ; Norway, 7,567 ; Russia (and Baltic Mission), 3,545 ; Sweden, 16,475 ; Switzerland, 11,938.

A Great Galaxy.—*Zion's Herald, Boston.*

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